

IMAGINATIONS OF EPISTOLARY SPACES:

DEVELOPMENTS IN LETTER WRITING BETWEEN
THE FOUNDATION OF THE POST OFFICE AND
RICHARDSON'S *CLARISSA*

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DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed by me and all of the work is my own.

Signed,

James Stewart How.

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses key qualitative developments in the history of letter writing that took place as a direct result of the introduction—during the revolutionary Interregnum—of a national postal service available to the general public. An examination is made of repeated and vivid imaginations after this date of what can be termed epistolary spaces, which are a consequence of the newly regulated, mostly reliable, but governmentally controlled gaps in time between addressers and addressees of letters. These imaginations, analogous to the cyberspaces of our own era, are seen to be fuelled by increasingly cheaper, faster, and more efficient postal services developed throughout the period. They are by no means utopian spaces, however, and often become the scenes of strife and surveillance. The thesis demonstrates the existence of such imaginations by means of a detailed study of five real correspondences and of the fictional letters that constitute Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa; or the History of a Young Lady* (1747-8). Attention is paid to what epistolary spaces in these letters are like; how they are set up; and how maintained. They are variously seen as an arena in which vicariously to explore the new urban culture of London in Dorothy Osborne's *Letters to Sir William Temple* (1652-4); as a courtly enclave in the diplomatic letters of the dramatist Sir George Etherege (1685-89); as a venue within which to champion the cause of the Walpolian Whigs in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1716-18); as an aristocratic redoubt in the correspondence between two retired courtiers of the reign of George II, the Countesses of Hertford and Pomfret (1738-41); and as an equivalent of the aristocratic levee in the letters of the impoverished clergyman Lucius Henry Hibbins to the duke of Newcastle (1741-58). Throughout, I argue that such imaginary spaces are of cultural, political and social significance. Finally, the artistic achievement of Richardson's greatest novel is seen to have been aided by almost a century of imaginations of epistolary spaces; which are shown also to be found in the fictional letters of *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Anna Howe*, and *Robert Lovelace*.

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INTRODUCTION: IMAGINATIONS OF EPISTOLARY SPACES

In referring to anything your friend has said in his letter, it is best to quote the exact words, and not to give a summary of them in your words. A's impression, of what B has said, expressed in A's words, will never convey to B the meaning of his own words.

from Lewis Carroll's 'Eight or nine wise words about letter writing' (1982, 1094)

A born letter-interceptor. You can see it in his eye.

Chuffie's description of the American millionaire J. Washburn Stoker, in P.G.

Wodehouse's Thank you Jeeves (1977, 54)

In his novel *Neuromancer* William Gibson, as Charles Murray notes, “invented cyberspace as a metaphor.”¹ Gibson describes this special setting for a great deal of the action that takes place in his novels as a “consensual hallucination” (1995, 12). In other words cyberspace is a purely imaginary construct, made possible by “powerful communications devices using high speed computers” (Buick and Jevtic 1995, 87). Since the publication of Gibson’s novel imaginations of cyberspace have become so widespread that few computer users would fail to understand what is meant by the term. As Linda Harasim notes:

the fusion of computers and telecommunications over the past twenty years has created a worldwide web of computer networks; these networks, initially established for transferring data, have been adopted by people who want to communicate with other people ... [and] transformed ... into a social space where people connect with one another. (1993b, 15)

My thesis is that as a result of the introduction and development of an English Post Office available to the general public—between the 1650s and 1750s—similar or analogous social spaces began to be imagined by letter writers and readers. Instead of cyberspaces I term these imaginations epistolary spaces. In this thesis I demonstrate first of all that epistolary spaces are indeed imagined during the period of my study; then describe what they are like, how and why they are set up, and how maintained; and finally consider their implications and consequences. Throughout, I argue that such imaginary spaces are of cultural, political, and social significance.

Unlike cyberspaces today, I do not argue that epistolary spaces between the 1650s and 1750s were universally acknowledged in the manner of a “consensual hallucination”; nor that behaviour patterns associated with Internet technologies are merely a replication of those seen upon the introduction of postal technologies. In *The Victorian Internet*, however, Tom Standage does make such claims for his period: arguing that as a result of the introduction of the electric telegraph during the 1840s “within a few years a global telegraph network linked the nations of the world, carrying personal messages, news and business intelligence”; and that “the Victorian Internet even had its own nerds.”² In a review of Standage’s book Marina Benjamin criticizes his thesis on the grounds that “as a rule, historical approaches that view the past in terms of precursors ought to be resisted. They elicit the wrong kind of fascination ...”³ Rather, the concept of epistolary space describes behaviour patterns unique to letters; to which patterns in cyberspace function only as an analogy. The analogy is useful and will be returned to in chapter six.

Here, though, I want to underline a crucial difference between cyber- and epistolary spaces. This is drawn attention to by Anita and Frank Kermode—in their introduction to *The Oxford Book of Letters*—when they lament the introduction of technologies which eliminate: “that delay between letter and reply which is a seemingly minor but in truth an essential part of the pleasures and the related pains of traditional correspondence, as all who have made love by mail will be aware” (1995, xix). This delay is indeed essential to the functioning of letters. For to my mind the protracted pleasures and pains that the Kermodes speak of ensure that letter writers and readers become almost constantly aware of the length and difficulty of the journey that a letter makes as it passes from addresser to addressee. Thus it would not be very surprising that they would begin to imagine as a ‘space’ the road upon which this journey takes place. Epistolary spaces between letter writers and readers are, then, specific to each individual correspondence; and consequently are imagined in many different ways. In contrast, Kevin Robins identifies common conceptions of cyberspace as always and already there before any individual user enters into it: “a nowhere-somewhere in which we shall be able to recover the meaning and the experience of community” (1995, 136). Again, Harasim asks of cyberspace “Yet

where is 'here'? It is likely that the receiver of the message has no idea of the physical location of the sender ... 'Here' has come to signify a virtual world on the network" (1993b, 17). Letter writers engaged in long-term correspondence, on the other hand, do not experience such forms of disorientation and have clear conceptions of their own imaginations of epistolary space.

An immediate example of what I mean occurs in the letters from Madame de Sévigné to her daughter, Madame de Grignan, written between 1671 and 1694. In the midst of a melancholy contemplation on the "thousands and thousands of miles" between herself and her daughter—a frequent topic of discussion in their correspondence—de Sévigné remarks:

You put it very well: we talk to each other and see each other through a thick piece of crape. You know Les Rochers, and your imagination knows more or less where to find me. For my part, I do not know where I am; I have made a Provence for myself, and a house at Aix that is perhaps more beautiful than yours really is: I can see you and find you there. (61)⁴

Although she quickly curtails this line of thought—"This is a fantasy that I could pursue much further; but I give it up" (61)—such a visualisation of an imaginary space within which the addresser and addressee of a letter can meet each other and walk about is a powerful and significant metaphor. Unlike a cyberspace it is a direct consequence of the specific dating and addressing of letters between mother and daughter: or more specifically of the spaces between those particular dates and addresses. By this I mean that if they had been in different places at different times then de Sévigné's imagination of epistolary space would have been different.

The spatial metaphor is returned to by de Sévigné again and again. For instance, on the 25th of February 1685 she writes:

Alas! my dear, I am always near you, and I feel—though with less delicacy than you—the truth of what you were saying one day (though I made fun of it), namely, that you really occupy such a place in my feelings and imagination that I am for ever seeing and following you. (166)

Despite, however, tendency to see her daughter's house at Aix as "perhaps more beautiful" in this imaginary space than in reality, there is always the sense of the

“thick piece of crape” between mother and daughter in any reading of the correspondence. In de Sévigné’s usage this appears to block true communication; and to be a consequence of the distance which separates the two correspondents. It is all very well, then, having a clear conception of how you imagine epistolary space but communicating that imagination to your correspondent is another matter. As a result, after more than fourteen years of imaginations of epistolary spaces de Sévigné remarks: “But, my dear, I honour a little reality infinitely more highly” (166). For this reason I find it hard to accept Elizabeth Goldsmith’s claim that de Sévigné developed in her letters “a unique psychological territory for epistolary conversation”; as also her wish to describe those letters “using the metaphor of pastoral retreat” (1983, 75). This is to ignore what H. T. Barnwell describes as de Sévigné’s “glaring psychological error” (1960, ix). This error, which Barnwell takes as proof that de Sévigné could not have wished or designed her letters to be published, is the “effusions of her affection for her daughter” (xiv). Indeed he notes that: “Much criticism has been levelled against this excessive and passionate motherly affection” (ix). In my reading much of this excess is a result of the uncertainties and ambiguities ever present in imaginations of epistolary space: the “pains” spoken of by the Kermodes. For instance one such outburst is directly occasioned by a breakdown in the local postal service. Here de Sévigné writes to her friend the Abbé d’Hacqueville as follows: “Has my daughter stopped writing to me? Is she ill? Are my letters being stolen? ... am I not right to be worried? Then relieve my anxiety and run to all the places to which my daughter writes, so that I may at least know how she is” (57-8). Clearly the “thick piece of crape” between mother and daughter allows for the creation of no such “more personal ‘pays du détachement,’ in which written conversation can assume a fixed, stable reality” (Goldsmith 1983, 74).

The Letter-Register

If de Sévigné’s imagination of epistolary space cannot be seen in terms of pastoral retreat—if it seems to cause her as many pains as pleasures—then it is relevant to

question why she undertakes quite such a voluminous and wide-ranging correspondence with her daughter. Precisely: why was it that she persisted in the face of these ‘pains’ to open up such a complex space? What did it mean to her? And what was at stake as she did so? The answers to such questions are shown—in each of the correspondences that I consider in this thesis—to be of either cultural, political, or social significance. Similarly, the reasons why other letter writers in other periods choose not to open up epistolary spaces have significance; and a brief look at a few such reasons in this introduction will highlight the achievements of my chosen correspondences. For unlike the prolific de Sévigné some writers attempt to constrain their correspondences to the barest of minimums: seemingly in the attempt to avoid the risks and interferences of the “thick piece of crape” of which de Sévigné speaks. Susan Wright argues, in her essay on letters, that these risks are fundamental to the genre: for as opposed to what happens in face-to-face conversation, “correspondents have a greater opportunity for misunderstanding, confusion and conflict where there is no possibility for direct intervention” (1989, 554). In the face of the same belief de Sévigné must have had very good reasons indeed to write as many letters as she did and hence to risk conflict developing; as what was at stake was her relationship with her only daughter.

In contrast, Lewis Carroll appears to have had reasons not to write too many letters. In an essay written in 1890 he looks back on what appears to have been a traumatic life-time of letter writing and attempts to distil his learnt wisdom into a series of rules. The traumas from which he hopes that his readers might be spared range from unnecessary contacts with the Dead-Letter Office to the irritating habit of “ladies *only*: no *man* would ever do such a thing ... [to] put ‘Wednesday’, simply, as the date! ‘That way madness lies’” (1982, 1093). There are serious consequences—hinted at in the first epigraph to this introduction—to be expected from the indulgence of such madness; especially in the case of “correspondence that has unfortunately become *controversial*” (1095). Carroll notes that:

My seventh Rule is, if it should ever occur to you to write, jestingly, in *dispraise* of your friend, be sure you exaggerate enough to make the jesting *obvious*: a word spoken in *jest*, but taken as earnest, may lead to very serious

consequences. I have known it to lead to the breaking-off of a friendship. (1096)

Why, then, does Carroll urge such extreme wariness against Wright's "misunderstanding, confusion and conflict" in the writing of letters? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that he directs his advice at a very specifically upper or upper-middle class readership: there is no sense here of the egalitarianism of the services provided by W.H. Auden's 'Night Mail'—delivering "Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,/ The shop at the corner, the girl next door" (1966, 83). For example, problems are anticipated as a result of correspondents having addresses in Torquay as well as in London; and as a result of difficulties encountered whilst hiring and firing servants. During the *fin de siècle* 1890s, a period usually seen as unstable, such a comfortable world was often perceived to be under threat: with prevalent feelings of moral and cultural deterioration (after the highs of the Victorian golden age), and the establishment of socialist and women's movements.⁵ There was thus no room for the propagation of unnecessary disputes between the governing classes; and hence for the luxury of the imagination of unstable epistolary spaces. And besides the dangers posed by the development of arguments between intended addresser and addressee, what if such letters should be intercepted, read, and misunderstood by members of the lower classes or of a women's group?

In the face of such dangers Carroll recommends the keeping of what he terms a 'Letter Register'—which he describes minutely: "Get a blank book, containing (say) 200 leaves, about 4 inches wide and 7 high. It should be *well* fastened into its cover, as it will have to be opened and shut hundreds of times" (1982, 1098). Such a device is intended to hold the language of letters in check by recording within a series of elaborate and precisely defined margins "a *precis* of each Letter, received or sent, in chronological order" (1098). By the use of this method a gentleman always has the means at his disposal rapidly to bring down to earth (or at least towards his own viewpoint) the imaginations of any of his correspondents as to what their letters have been about. For example, Carroll notes that:

if any difficulty arises, years afterwards, in connection with a half-forgotten correspondence, [my Letter Register] enables me to say, with confidence, "I did *not* tell you that he was 'an *invaluable* servant in *every* way', and that you *couldn't* 'trust him too much.' I have a *precis* of my letter. What I said was 'he is a *valuable* servant in *many* ways, but *don't* trust him too much.' So, if he's cheated you, you really must not hold *me* responsible for it!" (1098)

By taking such precautions Carroll blithely assures his readers that unpleasant difficulties can relatively easily be avoided. And yet in the recommending of them he actually does no more than attest to a belief in the instability and uncertainty of the language of letters—which he acknowledges is easily capable of destroying friendships and business relationships at a glance.

Carroll's desperate attempt to ensure that the meanings of letters are fixed are a consequence of the belief (evidently shared by both Wright and de Sévigné) in what Stanley Fish describes as a "hierarchy of communication situations" (1989, 56). This belief sets an "optimal context, a face-to-face exchange of utterances between two people who know each other, and who are able, in the event of confusion or discontinuity or obscurity, to put questions to one another"; against less certain forms of communication such as that which occurs "between persons who know each other but who are separated either by time or by space and are therefore reduced to the medium of letter or telegram or telephone" (38). In his essay on the language of letters Homer Brown draws attention to the centrality of such beliefs in Western culture when he notes that "Socrates said that the problem of all writing is that it is parentless"; and then goes on to quote from the *Phaedrus*:

And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself. (1977, 579)

This is a statement of exactly the problem that Carroll believes himself to face: his anxieties about his orphaned writing exacerbated by the decadent cultural and social conditions prevalent during the 1890s, to the point at which he does not dare to write

and send letters like those of de Sévigné. His Letter Register is in effect an attempt to come to the help of the unfairly abused language of his letters.

Many theorists subscribe to similar beliefs about letters as Carroll. For example Brown himself comments on:

the necessary *difference* of meaning of the letter when read later or by someone other than the one addressed. Of all written documents, the personal letter seems to be the most vulnerable, the most susceptible to this drift of meaning. Unless destroyed in the moment for which it was written, it is in its nature to wander. (1977, 583)

The work of Jacques Derrida, however, has called into question such statements: as they imply belief in the possibility of what Fish describes as “a kind of speech act that is not orphaned” (1989, 44). On the contrary in his essay “Signature Event Context” Derrida ponders the possibility of interpretation to which every utterance is open and asks:

is this general possibility necessarily that of a failure or a trap into which language might *fall*, or in which language might lose itself, as if in an abyss situated outside or in front of it? ... Or indeed is this risk, on the contrary, its internal and positive condition of possibility? this outside its inside? the very force and law of its emergence? (1982, 325)

For Fish there are indeed risks and hazards attendant on any effort to fix and determine meanings, so that “the shape of belief (either about another or about oneself) is responsible for the shape of interpretation, irrespective of whether those beliefs operate at a remove or in a proximate encounter” (1989, 43). What Carroll is doing, then, is subscribing to a set of beliefs which holds that writing represents as best it can something that is unproblematically transparent and ‘real’; in fact he is subscribing to “an entire metaphysics, the metaphysics of presence, of objects and/or intentions that possess a purity which can either be preserved or compromised in the act of communication” (45). If Derrida is to be believed, though, the difference between the reading of the ‘real’ and the reading of a letter comes down only to what Fish terms “distinctions between different kinds of interpretative practice” (54).

The letter writers that I deal with in this thesis hold to what Fish describes as “the traditional or classical view [in which] the risk of interpretation is only incurred when the conditions of communication are characterized by distance and etiolation” (1989, 45). They are using a form of discourse (the letter) which has become characterised by interpretative lack of confidence and consequently by a maximum of self-conscious interpretative work; as opposed to ordinary or everyday (face-to-face) discourse which is characterised by “interpretative confidence” (54). These characterisations are socially determined and perceived as common-sensical; and are thus very powerful. This is revealed by a series of episodes in Beryl Bainbridge’s *Every Man For Himself*, elaboration of which serves again to highlight the achievements of the correspondences considered in this thesis. In the novel a brief interlude of comedy is provided on board the doomed ocean-liner *Titanic* by the moment of transmission of an “admittedly gauche note” (1997, 103). Morgan—the central character of the novel—has just spent a considerable time struggling to write what turns out to be only the briefest of love-letters to the object of his unrequited love. Even so, he “didn’t immediately slip the letter under Wallis’s door, believing it more prudent to turn the words over in my mind while taking a stroll on deck” (104). Immediately, then, he is confronted by a degree of anxiety at the thought of letting his letter go. Later on, when seemingly decided and on his way to deliver the letter, Morgan pauses as a dog jumps at the sun bursting forth from behind clouds—and concludes that this gesture:

so perfectly mirrored my own deluded behaviour that I took out my letter and was in the act of casting it overboard when a sudden gust of wind tore it from my hand and blew it back on deck, at which the dog, cheated of the sun, pounced on it and trotted triumphantly away. Horrified that others might read what I’d so foolishly written, I gave chase. (104-5)

In the most literal of ways Morgan is here forced to confront the horror of the straying that Brown describes; and also the dangers of which Carroll warns. After a long chase: “just when I thought I had the wretched animal cornered it leapt the iron gate separating the first and second class areas and disappeared [with the letter still in its mouth] from sight” (105). This particular straying of the language of his letter has

particular resonance for Morgan. For although his journey on board the *Titanic* takes place in conditions of the utmost luxury he had originally travelled to New York, as a young orphaned boy, in poverty and in the steerage section of a ship. At times Morgan enjoys the high-life without shame and at other times, particularly as the *Titanic* begins to founder, he is troubled by visions of “those bewildered souls I had seen below in the steerage class” (193). Morgan’s feelings of horror as he chases the dog are thus only assuaged when he manages to rescue his ill-treated and abused letter from possible misinterpretation on the lower decks. Just like Carroll, then, Morgan has specific (social) reasons, this time related to his precarious position in high society, for fearing the opening up of an epistolary space.⁶ What if the letter gets intercepted? What if Wallis misinterprets it? The panic that he experiences at the loss of his letter is an index of what the letter writers considered in this thesis have to overcome in order to have the courage to send their letters.

Every Man For Himself is full of unfinished and unsent letters afraid to submit to what Derrida terms in the ‘Envois’—a collection of postcards sent to an unnamed lover—“*postal différance*” (1987, 191).⁷ For example, after a drinking session Morgan “penned a ridiculous letter to my uncle telling him I intended to follow in his footsteps and make him proud of me ... Fortunately I was not too far gone to tear it up before I dozed off at the writing table” (1997, 138). But the most significant letter is the aforementioned note that Morgan repeatedly attempts to send to Wallis. Morgan just cannot let this letter go. Some time after he has recovered the letter from the dog he informs the reader that: “In my head I pretended I’d delivered the note and that [Wallis] and I had met on the promenade and come to an understanding” (116). In reality such understanding seems far away. Having composed the note a drop of blood (the result of an earlier sporting injury) had fallen from his forehead and onto the page of his letter: “it landed exactly beside my signature and became star-shaped. Far from looking messy, I reckoned it lent emotional significance” (103). Later on, looking again at the blood-spot, he decides that it surely “counted for something” (137). What it counts for to Morgan is the sudden possibility of not being misunderstood: the fixing of the presence of the emotion of a particular addresser on the page. But the grasping of this last straw only

demonstrates the extent of Morgan's anxiety. For Derrida any such attempt is doomed to failure when even the signature (accompanied or not as it might be by a spot of blood) is made dubious—and yet, paradoxically, functional—by its status as writing and therefore by “the threat and the necessity of its repeatability” (Collins and Mayblin 1996, 88). At the start of the ‘Envois’ Derrida notes that “in order to make peace within you I am signing them here in my proper name, Jacques Derrida”; only to immediately destroy any such peace in a footnote that laments: “I regret that you [*tu*] do not very much trust my signature, on the pretext that we might be several ... You are right, doubtless we are several ...” (1987, 6). In effect, even the signature is “detachable from the signatory and the signatory's intentions” (Collins and Mayblin 1996, 87). This is not to deny that the narrator of the ‘Envois’ sometimes desires just such a form of communication as does Morgan. For example, he declares: “I would like to write you so simply ... so that above all the language remains self-evidently secret, as if it were being invented at every step, and as if it were burning immediately, as soon as any third party would set eyes on it” (1987, 11). But this is never seen to be possible and in the end the wish functions only as a sad refrain. For even before the ‘Envois’ proper have begun the narrator asks a series of questions:

Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address? ... I owe it to whatever remains of my honesty to say finally that I do not know. Above all I would not have had the slightest interest in this correspondence and this cross-section, I mean in their publication, if some certainty on this matter had satisfied me. (5)

Lack of certainty thus becomes the condition of continued existence—precisely the narrator's lack of ‘satisfaction’—of the ‘Envois’. For other letter writers lack of certainty is either something that has with reason to be braved; something that has to be fought with primitive devices such as the Letter Register; or something that prevents entirely the sending of letters.

Morgan certainly *cannot* cope with so much uncertainty: his ambivalence about the social gap between himself and the regally wealthy Wallis is too great to be overcome by a spot of blood. A day after his first attempt he does finally deliver his love-letter—but has second thoughts when he imagines the scene of Wallis reading:

“she was picking up the envelope, tearing it open, smoothing out that creased sheet of paper with the rusted splodge below my name. She was frowning. ‘Oh God,’ I cried out loud” (1997, 139). Dismayed, Morgan rushes to recover the letter from Wallis’s cabin before she has had time to read it. But in doing so his illusions are shattered when he creeps in and witnesses his new friend Scurra making love to Wallis. If he had overcome his anxieties and social phobia and sent the letter earlier he knows that this might never have happened. Morgan’s need for the drop of his own blood beside his signature; his inability to address Wallis as the person she believes herself to be; and most of all his terror at the prospect of sending his writing, all perhaps relate to what he has in common with Socrates’ description of writing: its and his parentlessness. Orphaned himself, he cannot bear to risk the orphaning (and consequent rough treatment) of his own writing; and so repeatedly comes to its aid. No-one, though, comes to his aid. Out on deck and preparing to throw a portrait of his long since dead mother into the sea, Morgan is confronted by a carefree Scurra: “‘My dear boy,’ he said. ‘Have you not yet learnt that it’s every man for himself?’” (144).

In contrast to Morgan, Scurra is seen as a cipher who makes himself up as he goes along. At various times he accounts for a scar on his lip to different people as the result of a duel, of the bite of a parrot in South Africa, and of a blow from a rifle. He appears to have no respectable origins and yet overcomes his own and his fellow passengers’ uncertainty by the sheer assurance of the way that he carries himself. In effect, he is not afraid to send a message about himself to everyone on board the *Titanic*. He manages to seduce Wallis precisely because it is every man for himself: which Morgan, unable to trust to the power of his own and Wallis’s imagination, does not realise until the end of the novel. He can never take the chance and leave his own words to themselves, as can Scurra: to him Scurra’s explanations of his betrayal are “Words ... Just words” (1997, 144). And yet according to Derrida both Morgan’s fears and devices such as Carroll’s Letter Register are in vain, as:

All the precautions in the world are taken in vain, you can register your *envois* with a return receipt, crypt them, seal them, multiply coverings and envelopes, at the limit not even send your letter, still, in advance it is

intercepted ... Once intercepted—a second suffices—the message no longer has any chance of reaching any determinable person ... (1987, 51)

Like the *Titanic* itself then—that most famous twentieth century example of something that did not reach its destination despite all the precautions in the world—Derrida's 'Envois' act out "the proof, the living proof precisely, that a letter can always not arrive at its destination, and that therefore it never arrives" (33). This is at once an enactment of Brown's description of the "ambiguously anonymous drift of writing" (1977, 579); and a consequence of one of Derrida's explanations to his addressee: "Understand me, when I write ... I annihilate not only what I am saying but also the unique addressee that I constitute, and therefore every possible addressee, and every destination" (1987, 33). Although this poststructuralist view of the functioning of language is more extreme even than anything Morgan fears, it is precisely anxiety about his inability to control his letter's reception that causes him to hesitate and hesitate until it is too late. In contrast, the letter writers considered in this thesis have far more in common with Scurra than with Morgan: in that despite their reservations about and their fears of writing they are prepared to take risks and to send it and hence to open up epistolary spaces.

The beginnings of the Post Office

To the late Victorian mind of Carroll imaginations of epistolary space are potentially dangerous; to the mind of Morgan they are emotionally too much to risk. To other minds in other times these imaginations might be culturally liberating or even serve as tools of political or social change. I have chosen to look at the period between the 1650s and 1750s because, as Steven Zwicker notes, this "was an age distinguished less by fragility and refinement than by obscenity and brutality"; involving "English literary culture in one of its most volatile and politically engaged moments" (1998, xi). I argue that English epistolary culture had a similar engagement during this period: the second half of which at least, as Howard Anderson and Irvin Ehrenpreis argue, can be seen as a part of "the great age of the personal letter" (1966, 269). Such an engagement was made possible by developments in the technologies of

communication: for just as there can be no cyberspace without the Internet, so there can be no epistolary space without the Post Office. For this reason the period of my study is fixed by developments in England noted by Robert Adams Day:

The English postal service constantly, if spasmodically, increased in efficiency, cheapness, and availability—with the appointment of a post-master general by Cromwell, the establishment of the London Penny Post in 1680, the use of stamps. It became easy to correspond on matters of no particular importance and to send and receive letters quickly and often. Thus, the personal letter was no longer restricted to business letters or emergency messages and might become a vehicle for something approximating conversation. (1966, 49)

And despite my references to de Sévigné, it will be almost solely with English letter writers that I will be concerned—for as Howard Robinson notes, the British Post Office “under the impulse of an expanding culture and the stimulus of an unparalleled industrial and commercial activity, made more rapid and consistent growth than the post offices of neighbouring countries” (1948, vii). The development of postal services to other parts of Britain took place at a much slower rate; and was never in this period, partly for reasons of geography, as marked as that within England. The history of the development of the Post Office will, then, be of almost constant interest in this thesis as it governs what types of imaginations of epistolary space are possible: for example in how often and how cheaply letters are collected and delivered and along which routes they travel.

Another reason for beginning at this point is Day’s argument that before the 1650s the letter had not “in general become realistic by escaping from the inherited formulas of classical rhetoric and stilted convention” (1966, 25-6). It is my contention that in the presence of these formulas and conventions imaginations of epistolary space are unlikely; and that only with the advent of a national postal service offering the ability quickly to send your writing and to receive reactions to your writing to which you in turn then react, and so on, would such formulas and conventions disappear. A brief letter or two a year sent in exactly the same style as any other letter of the same kind has been for hundreds of years past, to which is received a stock answer, is unlikely to fuel the imagination. Rather, the

correspondences that I deal with are chosen (as a result) of the remarkableness and significance of the imaginative life that they contain.

The liberations and changes promised by access to communications technologies were by no means in the interests of all sections of society; and it is thus hardly surprising that such access was withheld until the 1650s. In a review of a book by Stevie Davies entitled *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution 1640-1660*, Lucasta Miller draws attention to the fact that:

Mary Cary, the Fifth Monarchist activist, published a 12-point manifesto whose democratic proposals for reform—including the establishment of a national post office, a system of poor relief, and a wage limit on government employees—seem incredibly modern ...⁸

This evidence demonstrates how political were the demands for the right to be able to send letters: for it was only during the chaos and publishing mania of the Interregnum that such a manifesto could have been distributed at all. Before the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the subsequent Interregnum the right to send letters was almost wholly unacknowledged. It was not until the reign of Elizabeth that the “growing desire of the upper classes that they be allowed to share the royal posting arrangements [had even begun]” (Robinson 1964, 17). Robinson reminds us that:

Autocrats like Henry VIII and Elizabeth and the Stuarts of the next century were unwilling to allow the private carriage of letters. Treasonable plots were only too easily hatched. If subjects must correspond, by all means keep such correspondence at a minimum, and see that it be supervised. (1948, 7)

However, in the face of a growing demand throughout the first half of the seventeenth century for the extension of the right to send letters, some improvements were made to the extent that “foundations were laid for an organization that was to become permanent a decade after the death of Charles” (23). The process began when parliament in the early 1650s “announced its willingness to receive suggestions from anyone for improving the [post] office ‘for the best service of the state and ease of the people’” (40). This development led in 1657 to the passing of an Act by the

second parliament of the protectorate to create one general Post Office for the whole of the British Isles.

In the light of these developments it is pertinent to begin this thesis with an examination of Dorothy Osborne's *Letters to Sir William Temple*, written between 1652 and 1654. Osborne's letters have been justly venerated for the determination and stoicism that they show in the face of adversity. However, here they will be read as an attempt to gain a form of access—otherwise denied to many women—to the new culture blossoming in London despite the rule of the Puritans. I am thus concerned in chapter one with what I see as the first flowerings of epistolary spaces made possible by the new postal services; and indeed in chapters two to five only with slightly later flowerings taking place up to and about the middle of the eighteenth century. In consideration of the familiar letter in the eighteenth century Anderson and Ehrenpreis point out that a “literary form seems to flourish when its powers are just being realized, when the removal of obstacles or a freeing of resources makes gifted writers turn to it as an unworked mine, and test its strength through experimentation” (1966, 269). This too is one of my principal reasons for settling on a period rich with innovative and radical letters. Anderson and Ehrenpreis point to the development of regular postal services as a key factor in the qualitative change in the nature of letters written during the period—but strangely they do not consider any letters written during the seventeenth century.⁹ For although Osborne often chose not to use the new postal services—preferring instead to use trusted private carriers—large parts of her correspondence could not have taken place without them. Moreover, the ambiguous legality of the carrying of mails by private means at this time of the introduction of a national postal service draws attention to imaginations of epistolary spaces. Alan Marshall notes that conspirators during the seventeenth century often avoided the government's Post Office in favour of using the common carriers: despite the fact that such carriers were liable to be arrested and their postbags searched. And indeed, Cromwell's Act was designed specifically to “discover and prevent many dangerous and wicked designs, which have been, and are daily contrived against the Peace and Welfare of this Commonwealth, the intelligence whereof cannot well be Communicated but by letter” (quoted in

Robinson 1948, 46). Throughout her correspondence with Temple, then, Osborne fears that her letters will be intercepted. Paradoxically, this only serves to reinforce her imagination of an epistolary space upon which it is possible to trespass. In her case this fear of trespass is far more as a result of the social conditions of the time, which licensed male members of her family to police her contacts with the outside world, than as a result of Cromwell's paranoia. The imaginary life that Osborne lives in her letters will be seen as a way of escaping such policing; and to be worth the risks that she takes in the sending of her letters.

There were very many figures apart from Osborne's relatives between the 1650s and 1750s who were like the American millionaire of the second epigraph to this introduction; and their activities will be described in the various chapters of this thesis. So many in fact that the figure of the intercepted letter becomes almost a motif of the period. Lois Potter notes that during the struggles between Charles I and Parliament in the 1640s an important parliamentary weapon was the "the publication of intercepted and sometimes deciphered letters, culminating in 1645 with those of the king himself" (1989, 2). The letters captured after the battle of Naseby in particular were "all that any parliamentary supporter could have hoped ... they make plain that Charles had been saying different things to different opponents throughout the war" (59). As a result, the parliamentarians not only arranged for the publication of the letters but also arranged for their permanent exhibition at Westminster. There is then an added poignancy to Sir Peter Lely's 1647 portrait of the future James II delivering a sealed letter and penknife to his father, Charles I. Nor did the figure of the intercepted letter haunt the imagination of the royal family alone. For Anne Laurence notes that a "royalist newsbook reported in September 1643 on the interception of letters from London from the wives of men serving in the trained bands trying to recall their militant husbands" (1994, 244). Almost invariably the writers that I deal with live with the constant fear that their letters will be intercepted, which only adds to the significance of their imaginations of epistolary space.

Governmental interest in letters increased after the Restoration—although even before that time John Thurloe, the Secretary of State, already "had in his employ

an expert letter-opener” (Robinson 1948, 45). Marshall notes of the Restoration period that:

As literacy developed so, allegedly, did ‘dangerous’ and ‘seditious’ ideas ... One of the ways in which such ideas could be transmitted was through correspondence. The best means to control such correspondence therefore was a government-sponsored agency. The suppression or absorption of rival postal services by the state in the period goes some way to proving this. (1994, 78)

This governmental interest in letters belies Ian Watt’s tracing of a “significant change” (19⁵ 7, 189) in the nature of letters, from public to private, as letter writing increased. According to Watt, this movement culminated in “the novel’s concentration on private experience” (206). However my tracing of the existence of imaginations of epistolary spaces does not allow for any such easy transition. Marshall explains that the early 1680s, after the vicissitudes of the Exclusion Crisis and the supposed uncovering of various Catholic plots, was “the era *par excellence* of plots, whether real or imagined” (1994, 10). Epistolary space in this period thus becomes one more site of clandestine warfare. It was a new environment in which the government was intensely interested: a site, neither purely private nor purely public, of direct equivalence to the turbulent spaces of the taverns and coffee houses of London. As an exemplar of this potentially dangerous form of space my second chapter will focus on the letters of the Restoration dramatist Sir George Etherege—mainly written from Ratisbon to London as he attempted a new vocation. Frederick Bracher notes that: “As a diplomat ... [Etherege] was required to write regularly to Whitehall” (1974, xi). And yet these letters are by no means a version of the old form of public letter identified by Watt: rather they are a strange hybrid. Bracher notes that “Etherege suffered from the exile’s poignant hunger for news from home” (xix). As a result the letters come to resemble a kind of courtly enclave, public and private by turns. Moreover, this is an enclave which is threatened from without by the machinations of William of Orange and the fallibilities of James II; and from within by Etherege’s secretary Hugo Hughes: “a fervent Whig and censorious

Puritan, [who] hated his master's libertine ethic and royalist sympathies ... and his performance as a diplomat" (xiii).

The letters that I deal with in chapters three to five are all written after the ejection and final defeat of James II and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. As John Miller notes, together these developments worked "to produce a nation whose society, political order and world role were very different in the eighteenth century from what they had been in the seventeenth" (1983, viii). Paul Langford argues that in fact the changes were profound enough to justify the announcement that: "western society [had entered] ... its 'commercial' stage of development" (1989, 61). The *Turkish Embassy Letters* of the aristocratic writer and traveller Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the correspondence between two retired courtiers of the reign of George II, the Countesses of Hertford and Pomfret, and the letters of the obscure and poverty-stricken clergyman Lucius Henry Hibbins to the duke of Newcastle, all exemplify various aspects of this new socio-political order. Together they create new and differing imaginations of the epistolary spaces that had begun to develop in the 1650s. Sometimes, as in the letters of Hertford and Pomfret, these imaginations represent alternative venues for the burgeoning "community of taste" which John Brewer attempts to map among the "clubs and coffee houses [which] shaped social and cultural life [in the eighteenth century]" (1997, xviii and 36). At other times the letters reflect the new social and political orders of the dominant Whig oligarchy: first under Sir Robert Walpole and then under the Pelhams.

The letters of Hibbins and of the Countesses of Hertford and Pomfret, and even the diplomatic letters of Etherege, are very little known. It might then reasonably be objected that to be truly representative this thesis ought to consider better known correspondences such as that of the poet Alexander Pope. The answer to this objection is that no attempt is made here to be truly representative: to provide an overview of what was best in familiar letter writing during this period. My intention rather is only to consider imaginations of what I judge to be culturally, socially, and politically significant and interesting epistolary spaces.

The extent and hence social significance of the imaginative investment in letters of Osborne, Montagu, Hertford, and Pomfret is largely a question of gender. Shari Benstock notes that:

Separated from male enterprise and worldly activity, women established links with others through correspondence ... Letters provided freedom from the claims of reality precisely because they were private, recording desires that were necessarily silenced by prevalent social codes. (1985, 260)

Benstock argues that at some point these desires were deemed too dangerous and consequently “woman’s desire was forced under the dictates of the law” (264). This occurred at some point between the publication of the *Lettres portugaises* (1669) and Pierre Choderlos de Laclos’s *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782): at “the moment in literary history when epistolary fiction emerged as a *genre*—the moment when ‘letters’ became ‘literature’” (257). As a result gender was sacrificed to genre by a “rechanneling of woman’s desire, making it the means to serve man’s ends ... at the moment when woman’s own expressions of desire were appropriated to create a fiction of her desire in the epistolary *genre*” (264). In as much as this interpretation implicitly recognizes the existence of a liberating form of epistolary space that men might desire to shut down, it clearly and controversially defuses the radical potentiality of an epistolary novel like Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747-8). Benstock does, however, point to prevailing social codes which caused Osborne, in particular, and the Countesses of Hertford and Pomfret, to a slightly lesser extent, to shy away from the thought of publication and to invest the whole of their imaginative lives in letters. Montagu was more daring but published only scantily and only ever under the cloak of anonymity. She is now remembered largely as a letter writer and certainly herself seems to have considered the *Turkish Embassy Letters* as amongst her best work.

For the male letter writers under consideration the reasons for the extent of their imaginative investment in letters must clearly be different. Etherege writes his letters from Ratisbon many years after the great successes on the Restoration stage of plays such as *The Man of Mode*. In a kind of self-imposed retirement and exile from his beloved London he resists all the pleas of his friends that he return to writing

plays. He gives the impression that he is burned out—a sad and slightly ridiculous figure. He must, however, have realised that as a result of his epistolary exertions certain of his letters are almost as entertaining as the best of his plays. Hibbins, in turn, lives his life in letters as a result of his determination to wring either a job or money out of his unreliable patron, the duke of Newcastle. For almost two decades he writes a series of begging letters to Newcastle, attempting to distil all the misery of the poverty and illness-stricken life of his family into his letters in the vain hope that the duke will take pity on him and provide for him. The duke's reluctance to do so prolongs the correspondence to such an extent that Hibbins is forced to all manner of epistolary expedients.

Richardson's *Clarissa*

My final chapter deals with what I read as the representation of a life lived almost entirely within epistolary space: *Clarissa*. Many critics have commented on the excesses of content to which Richardson's choice of form took him. I read this novel in letters as a utopian take on the possibilities of the new imaginary environment of epistolary space, made possible by the now fully developed national postal service. The critical consensus on the tragic ending of *Clarissa* will be rejected in favour of a reading that emphasizes Clarissa Harlowe's successful imagination of a version of epistolary space during the few last days in London before her death. The triumph that this represents amounts to a radical assault on the social and political structures of the old order. Benstock's attempt to defuse the radical possibilities of novels such as *Clarissa* assumes that women's letters before this moment did indeed constitute "a private intercourse": that woman "has traditionally been allowed to write only certain kinds of letters—of the social, chatty type" (1985, 267 and 265). On the contrary, imaginations of epistolary space allow for the making of no such assumption. The letters of women letter writers in the period are deeply immersed and involved in 'worldly activity'—from Osborne's descriptions of Cromwell, to Hertford's description of Walpole's demeanour under pressure in the House of Commons. As soon as each of these letters is sent into epistolary space it matters: there is something

at stake at the very moment that there is perceived to be the possibility of interception. Epistolary space then becomes an empowering forum within which women can participate in the world of politics and take risks. Though it might be argued that this constitutes no more than an imaginary participation, I show that such imaginations often engender action and hence real change.

Benstock's mistake is that she tries to force a novel like *Clarissa* into a version of the narrative that Linda Kauffman refers to as "amorous epistolary discourse" (1986, 18); and that Peggy Kamuf terms "fictions of feminine desire" (1982, *passim*). Kauffman traces this narrative from Ovid's *Heroides* through to *The Three Marias: New Portuguese Letters* (1972). She notes emphatically that: "There is absolutely no question that the genre I am charting becomes assimilated into the novel, like a footpath joining a highway; my aim is to show that its trace nevertheless remains vital not only in Richardson's novel but in subsequent fiction" (1986, 120). However, if *Clarissa* is indeed "both an absorption of and a reply to another text" (Kauffman 1986, 18) then it surely has far more in common with Richardson's earlier *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1741) than it does with any of Kauffman's examples of amorous epistolary discourse. My argument is that *Clarissa* comes out of a tradition of historical rather than fictional letter writing. Indeed, similarities between the *Letters to Sir William Temple* and *Clarissa* have recently been remarked upon. Sheila Ottway notes that:

Taken as a whole, Osborne's love letters curiously anticipate the epistolary novel *par excellence*, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. Dorothy Osborne, like Clarissa Harlowe, is involved in a dangerous liaison: she secretly corresponds with a man of whom her family strongly disapprove ... Like Clarissa, Dorothy is torn between her sense of duty to her family and her feelings of amorous desire for her admirer. (1996, 152-3)

On the strength of the compilation of a lengthy list of such similarities Ottway muses on the "connection between the letter and the novel"; arguing that Osborne's letters are full of "novelistic glimmerings" (154 and 149). She does so by identifying the *Letters to Sir William Temple* as another clear example of Kauffman's amorous epistolary discourse. But to detect novelistic glimmerings in Osborne's letters seems

to me a bizarre case of anachronism. No doubt Kauffman is right to comment on “the fluid boundaries between the letter as literature, literature as a letter” (1986, 160). Yet surely it is more profitable to see the traces and influences of a certain kind of historical letter in *Clarissa* than it is to try to detect glimmerings of a genre not yet formed in Osborne’s letters.

Few critics have made such an attempt. Even Lennard Davis and Michael McKeon—some of the most recent and astute critics to investigate the rise of the novel—search for an explanation for the appearance of such early novels as *Clarissa*, as Ros Ballaster explains, mainly or only in “the study of ... prose fictional forms before the watershed of 1740” (1992, 12).¹⁰ In many ways this is surprising for Day pointed out long ago that the “question of how much Richardson may have known of this earlier fiction and of how much it influenced him is still unsolved” (1966, 9). Nothing has changed since; and indeed nothing else has come to light to change perception of the biographical and obvious fact that the production of both *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and of *Clarissa* was a direct consequence of Richardson’s own personal letter writing and of his conception, before he had ever turned his hand to fiction writing, of “a little volume of letters, in a common style, on such subjects as might be of use to those country readers, who were unable to indite for themselves” (quoted in Downs 1928, ix). This letter writing manual was eventually published (after Richardson had been interrupted by the writing and publication of *Pamela*) with the abbreviated title of *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions*. Richardson’s own personal correspondence in turn is well known and has been much discussed. Kauffman identifies his correspondence with Lady Bradshaigh in particular as “another provocative example of the transgressions of the boundaries of fiction, of the letter as literature, literature as a letter” (1986, 123). But if both the correspondence between Richardson and Bradshaigh and *Clarissa* itself are to be taken as just two more examples of the genre of amorous epistolary discourse then we have no explanation as to why *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, at this particular time in the history of this genre, advanced themselves to such a level of sophistication that they came to be regarded unreservedly by Richardson’s contemporaries as novels. True, Kauffman notes that “Richardson gave the novel but its second great impetus; its first

came from the *Portuguese Letters*" (121). But as Day points out "From Roman times onward, there was no period when some liaison between the letter and the narrative did not occur" (1966, 10). This does not, however, prevent him from explaining the timing of the appearance of Richardson's novels in exactly the same indistinct terms as Kauffman: "as the culmination of a process or development rather than as a literary eruption" (9). What had, however, changed in the hundred years or so before the publication of *Clarissa* was the introduction and gradual development of a national postal service. In chapter one of this thesis I show that such an introduction led almost immediately to clear if glimmering imaginations of epistolary space. And finally I argue that the achievements of almost a century of such imaginations were at least partially responsible for the eventual publication of the greatest of the epistolary novels. If such spaces were indeed new and had not existed much before the 1650s then it is surely not surprising that a new form of fiction, the epistolary novel, would be needed in order to provide adequate representation for them.

REFERENCES

¹ Charles Murray makes this observation in a review entitled 'When real talent imagines a virtual future', published in the weekend section of the *Independent*, 23rd October 1999.

² Tom Standage makes these claims in an article entitled 'Techno-nerds in stove-pipe hats', published in the culture section of the *Independent on Sunday*, 23rd August 1998.

³ This review was published in the weekend section of *The Independent*, 22nd August 1998.

⁴ All quotations from de Sévigné's letters are taken from Barnwell (1960); and are followed by a page number in brackets.

⁵ According to Lewis Carroll the meanings of letters written by women are particularly difficult to fix. Besides problems with dating he also notes that: "A Postscript is a very useful invention: but it is *not* meant (as so many ladies suppose) to contain the real gist of the letter" (1982, 1097).

⁶ There is also a wider political dimension involved in Morgan's fear of sending his letters: as the sinking of the *Titanic* in Beryl Bainbridge's novel is acting as a metaphor for the collapse of the Edwardian world of certainty. For Morgan this world is seen to be functioning towards the beginning of the novel as he watches while "two tenders ploughed towards the *Titanic*, bringing out mail [from Queenstown]" (1997, 59). As the *Titanic* begins to sink its collapse is revealed in one final poignant image: "Behind the officer's shoulders I saw a line of postal clerks at the bend of the companionway, heaving mail sacks, one to the other, up from the lower level. The sacks were stained to the seals with damp" (177). In this way

Morgan's fear about the precariousness of the kind of life that he has been living becomes bound up with an anxiety about letters not reaching their destination.

⁷ Interestingly, Jacques Derrida in the 'Envois' uses a somewhat similar metaphor to that used by de Sévigné when he writes to his lover: "It is as if there were a *meurtrière* between us and we look at each other through it" (1987, 128). The French word can mean either a murderess or a loophole. There is thus the sense of the murdering of meaning between the addresser and the addressee, just as the "thick piece of crape" obscures some degree of what de Sévigné can see of de Grignan.

⁸ This review was entitled 'Quaking, levelling and revolting' and was published in the review section of the *Independent on Sunday*, 5th July 1998.

⁹ Their argument being that it was only after the Glorious Revolution that the English Post Office offered a "convenient, reliable postal service" (1966, 269). This might have been true in general but, as revealed in chapters one and two, there were certainly areas in which such services were up and running before 1688.

¹⁰ See Davis's *Factual Fictions* (1983) and McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel* (1987).

CHAPTER ONE. GLIMMERINGS OF EPISTOLARY SPACE IN DOROTHY OSBORNE'S *LETTERS TO SIR WILLIAM TEMPLE* (1652-54)

*Blest be the man! his memory at least,
Who found the art thus to unfold his breast,
And taught succeeding times an easy way
Their secret thoughts by letters to convey;
To baffle absence and secure delight
Which, till that time, was limited to sight.*

from Anne Finch's 'To a friend in praise of the invention of letters' (1987, 29)

In the spring of 1655, “perhaps 200 royalists, led by the former colonel John Penruddock, seized the assize judges in Salisbury; but finding little support they fled westwards, into the arms of watchful troops” (Hirst 1986, 333). Attempting to account for the rapid suppression of ‘Penruddock’s Rising’, Ivan Roots decides that the “failure lay in the internal divisions of the royalists ... but also in the very competent intelligence and interception system established, along with the Post Office, by Cromwell’s able secretary of state John Thurloe” (1992, 36). The *Letters to Sir William Temple* of Dorothy Osborne, daughter of the man “best remembered as the last royalist to hold out fighting for Charles I” (Parker 1987, 3), were written during the period of this establishment of a national Post Office. For although Thurloe was not officially made “Postmaster General, receiver of foreign and inland postage in England, Scotland and Ireland” until the summer of 1655, by this time he “already exercised complete control over the post, and saw as many letters as he had a mind to” (Hobman 1961, 75 and 76). In fact this control had begun as early as December 1652 when Thurloe, shortly after he had become secretary of state, “was co-opted a member of the Council of State, and was put at the head of the department of Intelligence” (16). As he famously chose to muster much of this intelligence by means of the perusal of “a multitude of intercepted letters” (14), the early 1650s may at first appear to be an inauspicious moment for the production of what has been described as “the earliest considerable series of English love-letters which has come down to us” (Woodbridge 1940, 29). Alternatively, it may be seen as no more than a coincidence that Cromwell made Thurloe his head of intelligence in exactly the same

month as Osborne wrote the first of her letters to Temple.¹ This chapter, however, argues that Osborne opportunistically takes advantage of her nascent imaginations of epistolary space in order vicariously to experience the emergence of a new and vibrant metropolitan culture. The opportunity was a result of the prolongation of her courtship, which was made necessary by the opposition of both the Temple and Osborne families to marriage between Dorothy and William. In her taking of this opportunity Osborne is seen as uncomfortably similar to the sinister Thurloe: who took advantage of construction and control of the Post Office in order to suppress Penruddock's abortive attempt to rally the royalist cause.²

Dorothy Osborne on "the Towne"

In his introduction to the political context of Osborne's letters, Kenneth Parker notes that:

these letters underscore the argument that social and kinship ties were focused upon locality: going from country house to country house; wining and dining with the Briers family, with Lady Grey de Ruthin, is as much about politics, economics and marriage as it is about entertainment, so that we have the conditions for the creation and retention of a cohesive sense of community which could withstand new pressures and new ideas. (1987, 23)

And yet if this is so it is strange to what extent Osborne seems fascinated and repelled by, drawn to, and involved with London in both her life and her letters; almost certainly to the detriment of her sense of her own local Bedfordshire community. Her preference for London is perhaps explained by Parker himself, who draws attention to the implications of Osborne's reaction in a letter of July 1653 to Temple's mention of the "sad story" of the "litle Marquise": "When wee were both Girl's I had a greater acquaintance there, they lived by us at Chelsey, and as long as his son lived Sir Theador [de Mayenne, the physician] did mee the honour to call mee daughter" (107).³ Parker notes that "the letter ... indicates that [Osborne] knew the doctor and his family before she first went to France, which offers some corroboration for the view that she and her mother might have stayed with Sir John

Danvers and his family ... not only in the period prior to joining Sir Peter [Osborne] in St. Malo, but also after their return" (1987, 313). He further points out that the "Danvers town house in London was reputed to be sumptuous and elegant; it stood near Chelsea Old Church and next to the house in which Sir Thomas More lived" (263). Such sumptuousness and elegance would have been a welcome relief from the poverty and exile of the period during which "For two years Dorothy and her mother lived at St. Malo, endeavouring with their vanishing resources to send supplies to the besieged Sir Peter" (Irvine 1932, 100); from the period spent at St. Malo after her father "surrendered only because his troops were dying from starvation in Castle Cornet, Guernsey" (Parker 1987, 3); and from the period of "the process of relative pauperization" (4) during which Sir Peter on his return to England was forced to answer charges of high treason and to compound with the Parliamentarians for the Osborne family estate, Chicksands Priory. Perhaps this early experience of London explains the puzzle that Rosalind Wade finds in Osborne's seeming unwillingness to share her last years with Temple in seclusion at Moor Park, a fate which she had always seemed to desire above all others: "during this period, she did not live at Moor Park in any regular sense, but in the Temples' London home in Pall Mall, originally purchased for the use of young John Temple and his wife" (1986, 103). Wade guesses that this preference for London was the result of estrangement from Temple, who had become a "a 'town gallant' after marriage" (103). But if Temple did undergo such a transformation then it is hardly likely that London would be Osborne's residence of choice, however secluded she might choose to live there. To my mind it appears far more likely that Osborne's frame of mind closely mirrored that of her friend the celebrated poet Katherine Philips, who "pined for London" when absent; and who came to London at what was to be the end of her life, for "There, at the height of her fame, in the midst of the refined and cosmopolitan society she had always dreamed of, she got smallpox" (Greer *et al* 1988, 187).⁴

That Osborne did share such a fascination with London with Philips is clearly evidenced by much that is to be found in her love letters to Temple. And yet such a contention may seem surprising for at least two reasons. First, Osborne has long been associated with what David Cecil terms the 'quiet life' (1948, *passim*) and with

what Kingsley Hart refers to as “happy shepherdesses and an idyllic pastoral life” (1968, 9). In particular this association has been fostered by a passage from a letter of June 1653 to which Maurice Hewlett pays particular attention: “I said just now that we have no ‘prairie’ letter [as written by Mme de Sévigné] from Dorothy. We have something not far from it, though ... It is of her very best in the way of unforced, happy description” (1924, 245-6). The passage to which Hewlett refers contains the following description of life at Chicksands Priory in rural Bedfordshire:

You aske mee how I passe my time heer, I can give you a perfect accounte not only of what I doe for the present, but what I am likely to do this seven yeare if I stay heer soe long. I rise in the morning reasonably Early ... The heat of the day is spent in reading or working and about sixe or seven a Clock, I walke out into a Common that lyes hard by the house where a great many young wenches keep Sheep and Cow’s and sitt in the shade singing of Ballads; I goe to them and compare theire voyces and Beauty’s to some Ancient Sheperdesses that I have read of and finde a vaste difference there ... (89)

There *are* elements of happy description here and elsewhere in the passage Hewlett eulogizes but they are by no means predominant; and nor are they unforced. Rather, Osborne deliberately puts herself into the position of J. D. Salinger’s ‘catcher in the rye’: the wry and impartial observer afflicted with a heavy dose of ennui. She continues: “Most Comonly when wee are in the middest of our discourse one looks aboute her and spyes her Cow’s goeing into the Corne and then away they all run, as if they had wing’s at theire heels. I that am not soe nimble stay behinde” (89). In the light of this last sentence Osborne is clearly in line with the tradition whereby “the Pastoral had been from the outset an urban interpretation of rural matters” (Barrell and Bull 1974, 4). This suspicion is confirmed by the coda which Osborne offers in a letter of June 1653 (which neither Hart nor Hewlett mentions), which is clearly a response to Temple’s response to the previous letter:

’twould bee a pleasing surprise to mee to see you amongst my Sheperdesses, I meet some there somtimes that look very like Gentlemen (for tis a Roade) and when they are in good humor they give us a Complement as they goe by ... Tis our Hide Park, and every fine Evening any that wanted a Mistresse might

bee sure to finde one over there, I have wanderd often to meet my faire Lady Ruthin there alone, mee thinks it should bee dangerous for an heire ... (91)

Here Hart's "idyllic pastoral life" is immediately infected, as a result of Osborne's metaphor, by the mores of an urban park notorious as a venue for illicit liaisons.⁵

The second reason why it might seem strange to associate Osborne primarily with London is that she herself specifically rails against the city in a letter of February 1654: "I have noe buisnesse there, and am soe litle taken with the place that I could sitt heer seven yeer without soe much as thinking once of goeing to it" (172). And yet I read this statement as a mark of frustration and not of true wishes; for it is my argument that Osborne finds in imaginations of epistolary space a way of engaging with London and its new culture which does not involve actually going to it. Moreover, Osborne's strange repetition here of the phrase that she had used in her pastoral description in respect of residence at Chicksands—"this seven yeare if I stay heer soe long"—betrays a kind of subconscious frustration in itself; as if the phrase meant a length of time so long that it would never be bridged. As I shall go on to explain it is not that Osborne dislikes London, but that she dislikes the particular limits upon her freedom that are imposed on her when she is in that place.

Osborne's declaration that she could live for seven years in seclusion at Chicksands without ever thinking of going to London is certainly compromised by a reading of her letters. In January 1653 she writes, "If I sayd nothing of my comeing to Towne, 'twas because I had nothing to say" (50); and, "I may venture to write that I intend to bee in London if it bee posible on fryday, or Satterday, come sennight" (51); in February 1653, "I know nothing yet that is likely to Alter my resolution of being in Towne on Satterday nexte" (54); in August 1653, "I shall perhaps find buisnesse enough to carry mee up to Towne" (114); in September 1653, "I doe not think I shall see the Towne before Michaelmas" (122); and of "my comeing to Towne" (132); and in October 1653 that a friend, "baites mee Every day to goe to London" (140). True, many of these examples refer to Osborne's desire to visit Temple who happened to be in London; and not to visit London for its own sake. But did Temple just happen to be in London? Rather, there is always the sense that he is a man of the town and that this is one of the things to which Osborne is

attracted; and that increases the pleasure that she gets from writing letters to him. (And remember: Wade argues that in later life Temple became a 'town-gallant'). Certainly, a great deal of what is contained in the letters relates either to imaginations of past or future visits to London or to discussions of what is happening in London at the time. For example in August 1653 Osborne complains that, "I cannot Excuse you that proffesse to bee my friend, and yet are content to let mee live in such ignorance, write to mee Every week and yet never send mee any of the new phrases of the Towne" (112). In some consternation now Osborne goes on to write in the same letter, from her position of seclusion at Chicksands, that: "I beleeve I shall live heer till there is quite a new Language spoke where you are, and shall come out like one of the Seven Sleepers, a Creature of another Age" (113). Again, in January 1653, Osborne asks for details of the sorts of town entertainments that Temple is indulging himself with: "Wee heare of Great disorders at your Maskes, but no particulers ... I shall expect the relation from you, at your leasure" (46). From the evidence of these examples it appears that Osborne was as much in love with London as with Temple.

The interest that Osborne repeatedly shows in London was borne of experience. This is drawn attention to when, having considered lending Temple a volume of a romance which she has just enjoyed reading, she quickly back-tracks: "But what an asse I am to think you can bee idle enough at London to reade Romances" (57). The implication of this remark is that it is Osborne herself who is idle in the countryside; whereas Temple is active, busy, and entertained in London. And yet in August 1653 Osborne, in the midst of berating Temple for not writing her longer letters, writes:

but yet I know what tis to bee in the Towne, I could never write a letter from thence in my life of above a dousen lines and though I see as litle company as any body that com's there, yet I always mett with something or other that kept mee idle. (117)

Why should Osborne be idle in the town whilst Temple was active? Certainly enforced idleness was not a function purely of Osborne's gender; as in a previous letter she had noted that, "My Aunt is still in Towne, kept by her buisnesse which I am affrayde will not goe well" (60). This "buisnesse" of Osborne's aunt, Katherine,

Lady Gargrave, related to a long running legal “dispute over property matters with her relatives, or with the parliamentary government” (Parker 1987, 264). However, Lady Gargrave was a widow and had thus satisfied a tenet of the prevailing ideology which insisted that marriage was women’s “proper and ‘natural’ destiny; their character, education and behaviour were discussed almost exclusively in relation to it” (Keeble 1994, 116). Osborne’s idleness in London would seem to be related to her status as a *single* woman, which entailed that she be closely monitored and kept occupied with frivolities in case she become involved with anything more serious. This, as N. H. Keeble points out, was a result of the view during the seventeenth century of “Woman’s innate wilfulness, deceitfulness, cunning and lasciviousness” (1994, 71). In opposition to these womanly vices were placed the enforced virtues of “obedience and submissiveness” (1994, 96) to masculine authority: which was transferred from father to husband as directly as possible with the result that for women the family and the domestic “was supposed to map out the limits of their world” (Hobby 1988, 3).⁶ In the face of these prevailing ideologies how did Osborne’s interest in London ever develop? Nigel Smith speaks of “the fragmentation of religious and political authorities” (1994, 12) during the period of civil war and revolution between 1640 and 1660; and Elaine Hobby of women as a result “encroaching a long way into men’s territory” (1988, 17). Perhaps it was these trends and happenings which tempted Osborne to experience in epistolary space what had been circumscribed for her in reality. If so, then she later paid the price for her circumscriptions at the hands of both her brother and of her own conscience.

Why exactly was Osborne so attracted to London? P. W. Thomas notes that during this period, “Pride of achievement and a sense of the capital’s importance overtook the cliché of a swollen parasitic place ... [as London became] the engine of an astonishing, inexorable growth” (1992, 171-2); and F. J. Fisher explains of the first half of the seventeenth century that “the growth of London was perhaps the greatest change that was happening at this time” (1968, 77-8). This growth was so crucial that during the 1640s “it was tempting to see the conflict [ostensibly between Parliament and Charles I] very largely as one of London against the crown and the provinces” (77). As Osborne was quite possibly living in Chelsea at this point with

her uncle, the future regicide Sir John Danvers, it is quite easy to believe that her loyalties to her father's cause might have wavered at times. At the very least Osborne would have been uncomfortably aware of the power of "the London 'mob'" and of the fact, determined by Stephen Inwood, that: "from 1640 popular unrest in London began to force the pace of events" (1998, 222 and 221). Inwood notes that throughout the 1640s:

Londoners, unlike people elsewhere in England, could choose between different religious and political ideas. They could hear lecturers and preachers of various persuasions, and even attend the meetings of illicit sects in private houses ... Radical news-sheets were displayed and read out in taverns and shops, dozens of sectarian groups which had worshipped in secret now came out into the open and began winning converts ... In 1647 Leveller leaders met regularly in the Whalebone Tavern, behind the Royal Exchange ... (223, 225 and 234)

Although it does not appear that Osborne actually subscribed to any of the radical beliefs of the 1640s she was certainly infected by the enthusiasm of their presentation; and desired access to urban outlets of such ideas. John Morrill speaks of an "extraordinary explosion of pamphleteering and 'cheap print' in the 1640s" (1991a, 15); and Thomas notes that, "There had never been anything before to compare with this war of words. It was an information revolution" (1991, 125). Osborne would certainly have come into contact with some of this material; and indeed in a letter of August 1653 she writes: "I know not how I stumbled upon a new's book this week, and for want of something else to doe read it" (116). Smith notes that "In the 1640s the newspaper, or newsbook, as it was then called, happened for the first time" (1994, 54); and Inwood makes the source of such publications clear: "London was the national centre of printing, and in the revolutionary decades pamphlets and newspapers poured off the presses in vast numbers" (1998, 223). Belying her casual response to the newspaper, Osborne focuses immediately upon the radical: "I mett with somthing ... in't, that my concerne any body that has a mind to marry, 'tis a new forme for it, that sure will fright the Country people Extreemly" (116). Although Osborne is clearly against the new "forme" for marriage, there is little doubt that she is interested in hearing about such matters.⁷

Besides what she might have seen by accident or in passing Osborne also sought out the radical; or at least repeatedly put herself in the way of it. In May 1653 she recalls hearing with Temple, during an earlier visit to London, a “Mr Arbry’s Prophecy”:

In Earnest I had a litle Scruple when I went with you thither, and but that I was assured it was too late to goe any whither else, and believ’d it better to heare an ill Sermon than none, I think I should have missed his Belles remarques. (82-3)

There is a sense here that it is Temple who is exposing Osborne to the radical by overcoming her scruples; Temple who is granting assurances. And in fact one of the personal charges which Osborne reveals that her brother Henry has levelled against Temple is “that Religion or honnour were things you did not consider att all” (175).⁸ For “Mr Arbry” was in fact:

the Anabaptist preacher, the Rev. William Erbury ... [who] was apparently regularly at odds with the Church hierarchy ... declared a schismatic by the Bishop of Llandaff (Laud) in 1634 ... began preaching against episcopacy (1640) and ecclesiastical ceremony, and became chaplain of Major Skipton’s troop in the parliamentary army ... In 1645 he went to London, where he began to preach the doctrine of universal redemption. (Parker 1987, 298)

It is surely strange for a woman who quotes at length from and confesses herself to be a “devote” (182) of the Laudian Dr. Jeremy Taylor, to want to expose herself to the radical views of a man like Erbury; who was a part of a process during the period, noted by Smith, whereby “the sermon leapt out of the control of trained ministers and into the possession of untrained lay ‘mechanic preachers’ ... [becoming] swallowed up in the broader category of prophecy” (1994, 7). Admittedly later in the same letter of May 1653, in the midst of trying to calm some of Temple’s fears for their future, Osborne writes: “these are truths that might become a Pulpitt better than Mr Arbrey’s predictions; but least you should think I have as many wormes in my head as hee, i’le give over in time” (83). And yet this very lightheartedness surely betrays a remarkable openness to, and lack of fear of, the radical.

Again, in a letter of September 1653 Osborne reveals that she has heard a sermon preached by Stephen Marshall:

hee is soe famed that I Expected rare things from him and seriously I listned to him at first with as much reverence and attention as if hee had bin Snt Paul. And what doe you think hee told us, why that if there were noe kings no Queens, noe Lord's no Lady's noe Gentlemen nor Gentlewomen, in the world, twould bee noe losse at all to God Almighty. This we had over some forty times which made mee remember it whither I would or not, the rest was much at this rate, Enterlarded with the prittyest od phrases that I had the most adoe to look soberly enough for the place I was in that ever I had in my life. (125)

Here Osborne is clearly bored by the stale ideas of the man described by Hirst as representing by 1653 the "old faithful of mainstream puritanism" (1986, 308). Perhaps Osborne had wanted to see Marshall as he had been, a firebrand: for Hirst notes that in "February 1642 the Commons, and then a wider audience, heard Stephen Marshall apply the frightening Old Testament text of the cursing of Meroz to all those who withheld their hands from shedding the blood of the popish enemy. Anti-Catholicism had gained an apocalyptic edge" (223). Marshall's preaching was so effective at this time that later in 1642, "when Sir Robert Harley's Herefordshire castle of Brampton Bryan fell to the royalists his tenants cited Marshall's vituperative *Meroz Cursed* as the reason they took up arms" (225). In contrast, in 1653 Osborne observes, "I cannot beleeeve his Sermon's will doe much toward's the bringing any body to heaven, more then by Exerciseing there Patience" (125-6). Her joking aside, that Osborne was so eager to exchange letters with Temple on such subjects demonstrates her involvement in the "series of expansions or dilations in various spheres of political, religious and cultural practice" (Smith 1994, 2) which accompanied the turmoil of the period. Such involvement would certainly have been frowned upon by her conservative family, who would no doubt have subscribed to a prevailing ideology which forbade "Any encroachment by a woman upon the masculine spheres of scholarship and politics" (Keeble 1994, ix).

Whilst joking about her own tendency towards preaching in her letters, Osborne reveals in February 1654 acquaintance with a source of far more radical

ideas than Marshall's: "I am comeing into my preaching vaine againe what think you were it not a good way of prefferment as the times are[?] if you advise mee to it ile venture. The woman at Somercett house was Cryed up mightily, think on't" (178). Although Parker notes that this woman could have been any one of a number of preachers, Edward Parry convincingly identifies her as Anna Trapnel. Elaine Hobby notes Trapnel "falling into a trance on 11 January [1654 and] ... prophesying for eleven days and twelve nights to the crowds who came to hear her" (1988, 31). This trance was immediately celebrated in the pamphlet *Strange and Wonderful Newes from White-hall* in which Trapnel "laments the state of the Commonwealth, referring to the present powers as the 'fourth horn' of Daniel's prophecy, which must be overthrown at the imminent arrival of the Fifth Monarchy, the time of Christ's personal reign" (32). Small wonder that Trapnel was at once perceived to represent a "threat to the civil authorities" (67). Who was it who "Cryed up mightily" the treasonable words of this woman to the extent that Osborne heard about them in Bedfordshire less than a month later? Thurloe, Cromwell's Secretary of State, would certainly have been interested in finding out. Indeed Thurloe seems, perhaps more understandably, to have shared Osborne's interest in the radical. Hobman reveals that his practice of the interception of letters was a result of the fact that:

At home Cromwell's followers, in spite of the theory of unity, were in practice by no means all of one mind: there were many deviationists who only travelled with him part of the way. Extreme Republicans or Levellers had actually risen against the Commonwealth, and had been partially suppressed. The Fifth-Monarchy men, who tried to follow the code of Moses ... turned against Cromwell ... As for Roman Catholics who openly opposed the *régime*, London was said to be swarming with Popish priests ... (1961, 16)

And, for instance, Parker points out that William Erbury, whom Osborne had been to see with Temple, "preached at Christ Church, Newgate Street, until he was summoned to defend his unorthodoxies before a Committee for Plundered Ministries (in 1652), which Committee refused to accept his profession of faith and which reputedly had him put in prison" (1987, 298). In other words, both Osborne and Thurloe appear to have been interested in London for much the same reasons. All of the preachers whom Osborne mentions were principally associated with London:

Erbury with Newgate Street and Lombard Street, Marshall with Westminster, and Trapnel with Whitehall. Thurloe's focus is made clear by Hobman when she explains that, as "head of the secret service all news had its significance for him, whether it was the reaction of London citizens towards the accession of the Protector, [or] a minister preaching publicly against increase of taxation" (1961, 14). In fact it was Thurloe's job specifically to crack down on the process of which Osborne and Temple were a part, whereby: "the gossip and rumours of London were circulated to the provincial gentry by assiduous letter writers and whispered in taverns by the carters and carriers who handled inland trade" (Fisher 1968, 83).

Osborne, however, was by no means only interested in the radical ideas that proliferated in London during the 1650s; she primarily saw the capital as a vast arena of entertainment, of services, and of inviting social spaces with which she was not familiar. Indeed perhaps she even looked upon radical ideas merely as another form of entertainment (she certainly spends enough time laughing at them). In *A History of London* Inwood goes to great lengths to draw attention to the fact that the capital was not the barren place that it has often been seen as during the Interregnum:

after all the upheavals of the 1640s, life and government in Cromwellian London did not differ dramatically from that of pre-Civil War days ... Puritans were not teetotallers, and the most popular pastime at all social levels, drinking in taverns and alehouses, went on as usual ... Music and opera flourished in London under Cromwell's patronage ... There were many musical clubs in London's taverns during the 1650s ... Spring Gardens, near Charing Cross, and Mulberry Gardens were London's two pleasure gardens. (1998, 236)

Further, Lois Potter reveals that despite the closure of the theatres, throughout the Interregnum period "Theatrical activity continued in various forms" (1989, xi). Osborne's letters reveal that she was eager to take part in as many of these entertainments as she was able. In a brief note of November 1653, written during the course of a stay in London, she notes that she is, "ingaged to night at the three Kings to sup and play" (149). In another letter of June 1654 she reveals that she is "every night in the park and at new spring garden where though I come with a mask I cannot scape being knowne nor my conversation being admired" (199). These sorts of

activities clearly went on in the teeth of implicit opposition from the Puritan regime: for in 1654 after a series of assassination attempts on his own person Cromwell closed New Spring Gardens down (almost immediately after Osborne's nightly visits) and confined all lodgers, Osborne amongst them, to their houses. Moreover, Potter notes that in terms of "Cultural rebellion ... Attending surreptitious performances in the public theatres was the most dangerous activity" (1989, 34).

In the realm of what Alan Everitt terms "the rage for 'conspicuous consumption'" (1968, 49) associated with London at this time, Osborne was even more actively involved than she was with the realm of entertainment. She appears to have been an inveterate consumer of the services that only London was able to provide. In March 1653, unable to get to London herself, she writes:

When you goe into the Exchange, pray call at the great Shop above, (The Flower Pott). I spoke to Heam's the man of the Shop, when I was in Towne for a quart of Oringe flower water, hee had none that was good then, but promised to gett mee some, pray putt him in mind of it ... The French man that sett my seal's lives between Salisbury House & the Exchange ... and the Master of the Shop his name is Walker, hee made mee pay 50s for three but twas too deare. (67)

In September 1653 she writes of a saddler named Jones, "I bespoke a saddle of him once, and though it bee a good while a gon, yet I was soe often with him aboute it haveing much adoe to make him understand how I would have it, it being of a ffashion hee had never seen though since it bee common" (126). And in January 1654 she tells Temple: "I have not thanked you yet for my tweeses and essences they are both very good [,] I kept one of the litle glasses my self; remember my ring and in retourne if I goe to London whilst you are in Ireland i'le have my Picture taken in litle and send it you" (169). In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Campbell makes it clear that what he terms the eighteenth century consumer revolution was an effect of the development of modern fashion, which is characterised by:

the very rapid pace of change which occurs in shape, material and style, and evidence suggests that this quickened tempo began in the middle of the

eighteenth century, the turning point being the reign of George II, to be followed by a certain 'fashion frenzy' early in the reign of George III. (1987, 22)

And yet Osborne's letters provide evidence that such a frenzy was in intermittent existence almost a century before the reign of George II. In a letter of January 1653 Osborne notes that her friend Lady Diana Rich "sayes that seal's are much in fashion, and by showeing mee some that she has, has sett mee a longing for some too, Such as are oldest, and oddest, are most prized" (49). But later in the same month, in a very different mood, she notes that: "I have sent into Italy for Seales 'tis to be hoped by that time mine come over they may bee out of fashion againe, for 'tis an humor that your old acquaintance Mr Smith and his Lady has brought up, they say, shee wear's twenty strung upon a riban like the nutts boy's play withall, and I doe not heare of any thing else" (52). By these means Osborne reveals herself a part of the movement which necessitated the building of:

the new houses of Lincoln's Inn Fields, Covent Garden and Great Queen Street [which] were taken by landowners who wanted a comfortable base from which to enjoy London's rich cultural, social and political life, and to escape from the tedium of rural and provincial society in the winter ... the beginnings of the London 'season', is fairly clear by James I's reign. (Inwood 1998, 206)

Inwood notes that this movement towards the town became such a problem for the authorities that, "from time to time ... landowners were ordered back to their estates, where their judicial, military and social duties lay" (206).⁹

Many of these developments in the growth of London can be traced back to the reign of James I; but there were also elements in the London of the 1650s which were entirely new (as indeed was the massive prevalence of freely expressed radical ideas). Inwood notes that, "London gained a new and important social institution in 1652 when a Greek, Pasqua Rosée, opened the City's first coffee house in St Michael's Alley, near the Royal Exchange ... Cocoa or chocolate houses arrived in London in the 1650s too" (1998, 236). Stephen Dobranski even speaks of a "culture of the coffee houses" (1994, 46) first beginning to emerge in the 1650s; and of its

possible effects on the works of John Milton, despite the fact that “the relationship between coffee houses and literature usually focuses on [much later] figures like Dryden, Pope, Swift and Steele” (46). Dobranski argues that “coffee houses offered a popular alternative to taverns by the late 1650s” (36); a social space that unlike taverns “did not taint the reputation of ... [its] customers” (39); that “catered to Londoners from different social classes” (39); that offered, “convivial atmosphere ... [and] intellectual conversation” (41); and perhaps most significantly, a “propensity for political conversation” (42). Such an environment seems to be just what Osborne desired in her eagerness to speak of, for instance, the ejection of Algernon Sidney from the Commons (April 1653) and the “new discovered plott against the Protector” (196). Inwood notes that:

so important a part did conversation play in the intellectual life of London [at the time] that clubs were formed to encourage it. An early example is the scientific club begun in the 1640s, given royal patronage by Charles II in 1663, and known thereafter as the Royal Society. (1998, 297)

It seems more than a coincidence then that this new emphasis on the importance of conversation should develop at just exactly the same time that, with the letters of Dorothy Osborne, “the bare landscape” of English literature (as Virginia Woolf puts it) “becomes full of stir and quiver and we can fill in the spaces between the great books with the voices of people talking” (1932, 59). Osborne’s recourse to letters was a result of the fact that, as Dobranski notes, the “Coffee houses appear to have catered exclusively for men. Although they attracted a variety of customers across classes, the gender barrier remained. Women sometimes worked serving coffee, but the pamphlets do not refer to any female patrons” (1994, 55). And so if Osborne was aware of the existence of the first of the London coffee houses, then she would have been able to do no more than look on with envy.

Nor was her access to many other of the outlets of urban culture unfettered. Peter Clark notes that it was only “during the post-Restoration period that the inn became a grand social amphitheatre for the large numbers of country gentry now flocking to town”; and that during the 1650s the Major-Generals for a time were intent on cracking down on ale-houses as “hidey-holes of royalist traitors” (1983, 9

and 177). Besides, "In general women probably formed only a small proportion of alehouse customers" (131). Other social spaces were more certainly unavailable to Osborne during the period. In a letter of October 1653 she reveals that:

In Earnest you cannot imagin how often I have bin told that I had too much franchise in my humor and that 'twas a point of good breeding to disguise handsomly, but I answerd still for my self that twas not to bee Expected I should bee Exactly bred that had never seen a Court since I was capable of any thing. (137)

With no court in Puritan London Osborne was all the more likely to develop an interest in urban culture.¹⁰ Frustration at lack of unfettered access to knowledge of the town is fleshed out by the repetition of scenes in which Osborne describes her movements in London. In the first of these descriptions she excuses herself for not having seen Temple's father in town, even though he had seen her:

But tis noe wonder neither that I did not see him, for I saw not you when I mett you there, 'tis a place I looke upon nobody in, and it was reproached to mee by a Kinsman ... that hee had follow'd mee halfe a dousen shops to see when I would take notice of him, and was at last going away with a beliefe twas not I because I did not seem to know him. Other People make it soe much their buisnesse to gape that i'le swear they put mee soe out of Countenance I dare not look up for my life. (123)

Osborne clearly views this 'gaping' as an attempt to intimidate young single women out of free knowledge of, and access to, the town. Again, in a letter of March 1654 she guesses from whence Temple has had a story of her:

That which gave mee the first inclination to that beleife was the Circumstance you told mee of theire seeing mee at Snt Gregory's¹¹, for I rememberd to have seene B. there, and had occasion to looke up into the Gallery where hee sate to answer a very civill Salute given mee from thence by Mr Freeman, and saw B in a great whisper with another that satt next him and pointing to mee." (188)

Clearly, even in a London church Osborne was not free from the oppressive attentions of others.

In fact almost all of Osborne's experiences of London are coloured by the degree of control to which she was subject as she enjoyed them. In an early letter of January 1653 Osborne attempts to give Temple an account of her activities "from our Parteing at Goreing House" (42). Parker notes that Goring House—which stood "almost exactly where Buckingham Palace now stands"—had been refurbished in 1646-7 for the purposes of both the parliamentary government and the French ambassador; and guesses that Osborne "had visited there to attend a social function" (1987, 263). This hypothesis would fit in with Woodbridge's guess that, "Between the two journeys [made by Temple on the continent] there was apparently an interval of several months, during which [Temple] was presumably in London, and must have seen Dorothy at least occasionally" (1940, 15). But Woodbridge does not draw attention to the circumstances in which Osborne would have met Temple in London: for in the same letter of January 1653 Osborne relates that after the death of her mother, "At length, my Aunte (with whome I was when you last saw mee) comanded mee to wayte on her at London, and when I cam she told mee how much I was in her care" (42). In effect, then, Osborne was closely chaperoned during the social function at Goring House (which was when she "last saw" Temple). This aunt was the Katherine, Lady Gargrave, already mentioned; and Parker notes her "central role in all the marriage transactions" (1987, 264) involving Dorothy. Later on in February 1653 Osborne reveals that she will soon be coming to town, "but I am uncertaine where I shall bee, and therfore twill bee best that I send you word when I am there. I should be glad to see you sooner but I doe not know my self what company I may have with mee" (54). Parker reveals just what company this was when he quotes from Henry Osborne's diary: "My sister came up to London with my Lady Diana Rich and lay at My Aunt Gargraves by Charing Cross" (1987, 277). Thus although it is certain that Osborne did meet Temple during this visit to London, the meetings must have been fleeting; and were probably confined to covert rendezvous such as that arranged in the following note: "if I can see you this morning I will but I dare not promise it" (148). Another note excuses several missed opportunities and then declares that, "I will rise and dispatch some Visetts that I owe that to morrow may bee intirely Yours" (55). Did "to morrow" belong entirely to Temple? Perhaps;

perhaps not. But what is certain is that by May 1653 Osborne had decided to stay at Chicksands for the whole summer rather than visit London. This was not because she was indifferent to London but as a result of the fact that: "I am heer much more out of Peoples way then in Towne, where my Aunte and such as prettend an interest in mee and a power over mee, doe soe persecute mee with theire good motions, and take it soe ill that they are not accepted, as I would live in a hollow tree to avoyde them" (81). In other words Osborne's access to London was sometimes so hampered that it was not worth having. Such a reading of Osborne's motivations certainly does not fit with Cecil's account of a woman who led a consistently 'quiet life'; and who, "inspired by an ineradicable distrust of the world, strove ... to retire from it to a life exclusively personal, private, contemplative" (1948, vii); nor with Hart's description of Osborne's desire for "the idyllic joy of a life of seclusion and contemplation" (1968, 205). Osborne's letters rarely accord with such interpretations except in her blackest moments of despair, when she has given up on the world. Rather, her letters more often become a sustained attempt to open up a new form of imaginary social space in which she could be alone with Temple for sustained periods of time—in order to experience, amongst other things, the new and exciting culture of the metropolis.

The development of the Post Office

Such an attempt would not have been possible much before the period during which Osborne wrote her letters.¹² In his concluding remarks upon the state of change and continuity in England between 1625 and 1700 Thomas draws particular attention to the rapid growth of London and notes that: "Transport and communications kept pace as part of the process. Wagons drove out packhorses, and a regular stage-coach and postal system took shape" (1992, 173). Thomas has little doubt that "the Civil War, when communications were crucial, helped accelerate this development" (173); just as the world wars of the twentieth century rapidly hastened the development of a myriad of new technologies which have since had peacetime uses. Osborne, in 1652-

4, would have been one of the first beneficiaries of this rapid acceleration of communications technologies. Howard Anderson and Irvin Ehrenpreis note that:

the composition of informal letters depends on the possibility of a frequent, candid exchange ... Replies may not always be sent, but the likely chance of an early reply seems a necessary ingredient in the attitude of the true epistolary author. Yet while persons of wealth and power have always had messengers to carry their scrawls, it took the development of a convenient, reliable postal service to provide less exalted correspondents with an equivalent amenity. (1966, 269-70)

It could well be argued that this means that nothing qualitative *did* change in this period; that in fact only the quantity of the people to whom the imagination of epistolary spaces was open changed with the introduction of the Post Office. But in a discussion of the growth in the traffic of public news amongst merchants who “organised [from the fourteenth century on] the first mail routes, the so-called ordinary mail”, Jürgen Habermas notes that:

just as, according to Sombart’s definition, one could speak of “mail” only when the regular opportunity for letter dispatch became accessible to the general public, so there existed a press in the strict sense only once the regular supply of news became public, that is, again, accessible to the general public. (1989, 16)

In respect of the traffic in news, Habermas notes, “the organisation of this traffic on a *continuous* basis became imperative to the degree to which the exchange of commodities and of securities became continuous” (16). Similarly, imaginations of epistolary spaces only become fully possible with the continuity of an organised postal system. However reliable or well paid a private messenger or carrier is his service is in no sense continuous: a carrier makes up his route as he goes along, a route which could be different each time he delivers a letter. A carrier’s route is essentially unfixed; he will carry a letter to whomsoever his employer chooses and by whichever route he himself chooses (with the one caveat that it should, for the sake of his employer, be the shortest route practicable). And once a messenger is sent off with a letter he cannot be recalled in order that another letter may be sent; so that it

would take a very wealthy and powerful person indeed to be able to send as many messages as were desired by as many individual messengers as could be procured.

With the institution of regular postal services along prescribed routes, however, it becomes possible to imagine the permanence of such a thing as epistolary space. Evelyn Murray notes that by the 1650s:

the country was served by six main post roads—the North Road to Edinburgh, the West Road to Plymouth, the Chester or Holyhead Road and the Roads to Bristol, Dover and Norwich ... Other places were served by branch posts working out of the main roads, and letters between intermediate towns on the main roads were carried by what were known as the by-posts. (1927, 7)

This level of elaboration had, however, come about very quickly: for even as late as the end of the sixteenth century, “The regular posts were few and were periodically suspended” (2); and indeed they were “only four in number—(1) the Court to Barwicke (the post to Scotland), (2) the Courte to Beaumoris (the post to Ireland), (3) the Courte to Dover, and (4) the Courte to Plymouth” (2). These were “a service for the court, though some use was made of the facilities by persons on private business” (Robinson 1948, 21). Any such meagre use by private persons was liable to be taken away at a moment’s notice as soon as the slightest intimation of a plot was discovered; and so it would in no way be conducive to the imagination of sustained and coherent epistolary spaces. As Robinson makes clear, the “real beginnings of a public service only come in the next century” (21). Throughout the 1640s there was an “unseemly rivalry” between King and Commons for control of a much improved Post Office which had made genuine attempts in the 1630s under Sir John Coke, the King’s principal Secretary of State, to provide a service “more generally useful to the people” (38 and 23) than anything that had gone before. These advances suffered a severe setback when the “royal orders of July 1637 limited the postal service to letters on His Majesty’s business and to those subscribed by persons connected with the government” (33-4). This act led to a period of in-fighting over the Post Office that only ended with the execution of the King and the consolidation, in 1653, of Cromwell’s kingly power. In the meantime a host of rival claimants for control of

the potentially lucrative Office arose, including a London merchant named Burlamachi (a Royal appointee), the Earl of Warwick (a member of the House of Lords), and Edmund Prideaux (a member of the House of Commons). Prideaux eventually triumphed but in the ensuing confusion, and in the general turmoil of the revolutionary period, a host of cut-price competitors had emerged, each determined to provide the people with a reliable postal service.¹³ Robinson notes that: "Prideaux tried to prevent this successful competition by various methods. Prideaux's men murdered one of the carriers of his rivals and threw his body into the river. Another was assaulted with a drawn sword" (42). The confusion was only ended when "John Manley, the new farmer, entered on his duties June 30, 1653, with power to handle all posts, both inland and foreign, and to stop all mails carried by unauthorized persons" (42). At a stroke the rival postal services that had sprung up during the 1640s and early 1650s, children of the revolution all, were put out of business. Manley's contract, however, ran for little more than two years. For in July 1655 the Post Office was put directly under the control of Secretary John Thurloe. As Evelyn Murray notes, the "original object of the State monopoly was not so much to extinguish competition as to give the Government of the time access to the correspondence of suspected persons" (1927, 3). This was a change of tack indeed. Previous governments had attempted to stop any kind of communication of the people as a means of preventing the fomenting of plots. Now, Thurloe had decided that the interception of letters was a far more effective weapon; letters which were often "studied first and then delivered, without any indication that they had been read" (Hobman 1961, 18). Unpalatable as this was, it was a change of tack that allowed for the production of such sustained correspondences as Osborne's.

Glimmerings of Epistolary Space in the *Letters to Sir William Temple*

For the most part Dorothy Osborne did not choose to make use of the Post Office; relying instead upon a system of private carriers that operated between Chicksands and London. However, as Parker notes, this system was unusually reliable, set, and

determinable and so provided Osborne with the sense of a pre-existent space into which she could send her letters:

there were two carriers, Harrold ... and Collins ... [who] came to Chicksands on a Thursday, and left on their return journey to London on the following Monday ... The journey from Chicksands to London was approximately forty miles, and was made via Shefford, Hitchin, Welwyn, Hatfield, Barnet, Highgate, Holloway and Islington. (1987, 20-1)

It is unlikely that such a regular and reliable system of carrying could have been in operation much before the 1630s; and the improvements of the coach-roads that took place during those years. Nor would Osborne have been able to resort to a reliable postal service, when the carriers were not convenient, much before 1653. And it is quite clear from a reading of her letters that this is exactly what she very frequently did. After a visit of Osborne's to London in November 1653 Parker quotes from her brother's diary as follows: "This day my sister went to St Albion's where our Coach met her" (1987, 340). Clearly, whilst she was waiting for the family coach to return her to Chicksands, Osborne took advantage of the postal services in that place; for in her next letter she asks: "Had you the bitt of paper I sent you from St Albion's [?]" (149). Once Temple has removed to Dublin—which he did early in 1654—the problem becomes more acute; for the Osborne family carriers could only deliver letters as far as London. At first Osborne is unaware of how her letters will be carried thence, merely carrying on writing to Temple under cover of her friend Nan Stacy: "You bid mee write Every week and I am doeing it without considering how it will come to you, let Nan look to that with whome I suppose you have left the orders of conveyance" (187). But once Osborne herself has removed to London after the death of her father she becomes of necessity quickly acquainted with the workings of the new postal services—as she reveals in a letter of June 1654:

Why doe you say I failed you indeed I did not Jane is my witnesse she carryed my letter to the White-hart by Snt Jameses, and twas a very long one too; I carryed one thither since my self and the woman of the house was soe very angry because I desyr'd her to have a care ont that I made the Coachman drive away with all posible speed least she should have beaten mee ... (198)

The collection of letters from the “White-hart by Snt Jameses” was some part of the organisation of the “weekly packet service with Ireland” (Robinson 1948, 44) that John Manley had promised to effect in order to secure the farm of the Post Office in 1653. Interestingly this service was still available to Osborne, if perhaps less directly, even after she had removed to her uncle’s house in Kent; for there she excuses the shortness of a letter as follows: “my Brother told mee hee did not send his till ten a clock this morning and now hee cal’s for mine at seven, before I am up” (204). Thus it is clear that by 1653 at the very latest Osborne was able to send letters to Temple by these various means pretty much wherever he was; and pretty much wherever she was, without any significant delay. Consequently, as she herself notes in an attempt to convince herself that Temple’s being in Dublin rather than in London does not mark a worsening of her situation, “my heart has failed me twenty times since you went ... though I know 30 miles distance and 300 are the same thing” (187).

The letter in which Osborne describes barely escaping a beating in the “White-hart”¹⁴ evidences just how much the writing and the reading of a letter is affected by awareness of the moment of the transmission of that letter; an awareness which in turn fosters imaginations of epistolary space. The clandestine nature of the correspondence that Osborne was forced to as a result of familial interference only served to increase the level of these imaginations. For example on the reverse of the very first letter in the sequence are the words: “For Mrs Painter/ In Covent Garden/ Keep this letter till it bee calld for” (39). Clearly Osborne was writing under cover to a Mrs Painter who would hold the letter until Temple, by prior arrangement, arrived to pick it up. But the effect of such an arrangement is to complicate the letter’s means of transmission; and to prolong the time that the letter spends in epistolary space. So, when Osborne invites further correspondence (“But if you please to Confirme it to mee by another, you know how to direct it” (39)) she affirms that her letter will remain in epistolary space until Temple activates it by sending a reply. The Covent Garden arrangement also involved Osborne in complex imaginations of the progress of letters to and from Temple and herself about the streets of London.

For to ensure that Osborne had his letters on time Temple had to deliver them to Mrs Painter's house very early in the morning:

In Earnest I am troubled that you should bee putt to it, and have chid the Carrier for comeing out soe soone. He sweares to mee hee never comes out of Towne before eleven a clock, and that My Lady Painters footman, (as he calls him) brings her letters two howers sooner then hee needs to doe. I told him hee was gon one day before the letter cam, hee vowes hee was not, and that your old freind Collins never brought letters of my Lady Painters in's life ... (50)

Later directions on the outsides of letters give more information as to where Mrs Painter's house was to be found: "For Mrs Painter at her house/ in Bedford Street next the Goate/ In Coven Garden" (78). And it is interesting to note that when Osborne does manage to arrange an actual meeting with Temple in London she does so in replication of the destination of her letters, as if she were traversing ground her letters had already crossed in epistolary space: "This is to tell you, that you will bee Expected to morrow morning about nine a clock at a Lodging over against the place where Chareing Cross stood and two doores above the Goate Taverne" (54).

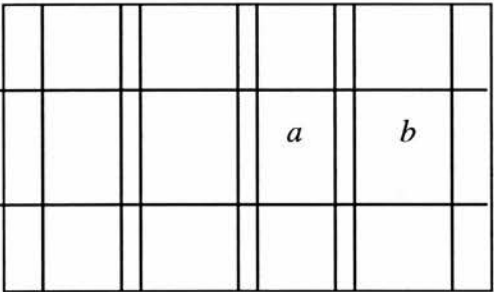
Nor was Osborne forced to imagine the progress of her letters only across London. For by far the most dangerous stage that letters of the correspondence had to cross in epistolary space was in the immediate vicinity of Chicksands. At first Osborne's anxiety in respect of violation of this space is directed at the carriers of her letters. For example in May 1653 she reveals that she has "chid" one of the carriers "most unreasonably" for:

when hee gave mee your letter I found the uper seale broake open, and underneath, where it uses to bee only Closed with a litle waxe there was a seale, which though it were an Anchor & a heart, mee thoughts it did not looke like yours, but lesse, and much worse cutt. This suspition was soe stronge upon mee, that I chid till the Poore fellow was redy to Crye, and Swore to mee that it had never bin Touched since hee had it ... (86)

To my mind the excessive anger directed towards the carrier here (which only comes to an end once the carrier reveals that he is in fact illiterate) is an effect of the way in which, as Barry Reay notes, gentry of the period were involved in "maintaining their

social position by spatial separation from the labourers” (1985, 16). If this were so—and if Osborne were indeed pioneering the use of a new space here—then it is understandable that she would feel ambivalent, and perhaps insecure, about relying entirely upon labourers for the maintenance of her imagination of epistolary space. An examination of the manuscripts of Osborne’s letters, held in the British library, reveals just how much preparation for difficult transmission affected them. Figure 1 shows a representation of the still visible—and incredibly intricate—foldings on the letter which the British Library terms ‘BL2-3’ (which Parker terms ‘Letter 1’ of the sequence). When fully folded the letter would have been very small indeed: showing only the tiny square upon which the address was written. This would have made the letter easy to conceal, or to overlook if searched for.

figure 1



a = fragmentary evidence of black seal marks

b = address (“For Mrs Painter ...”)

In the process of making these folds Osborne would have been unable to help imagining the dangerous journey her thoughts were about to undertake. Similarly, as he unfolded such constructions Temple would have been reminded of the letter’s moment of transmission. For example the manner of BL 15-16’s construction would have entailed Temple turning the paper around five times as he read it; a necessity induced by Osborne’s habit of crosswriting on both sides of the paper in different directions, in order that her letter could be folded small enough to be readily concealable. It was not, however, the carriers but Osborne’s own brother, Henry, who made such precautions necessary. For it was Henry who led the chorus of

disapproval of Osborne's choice of lover. This is revealed when Osborne tells Temple the story of what has befallen "your Boy":

My B. comeing from London, mett him goeing up & cald to him, & asked what letters hee had of mine, the fellow sayed none, I did not use to send by him. My B. sayed I tolde him hee had and bid him call for them, hee sayed there was some mistake int for hee had none, and soe they Parted for a while. But my B. not sattisfied with this rides after him, and in some anger threatned the Poore fellowe, whoe would not bee frighted out of his letter ... (105-6)

Osborne's vivid imagination of this scene and her admiration for the boy who would not allow her letter to be intercepted by her brother, reveals the depth of her preoccupation with the moment of the transmission of her letters.

A cryptic address on the reverse of a later letter reveals even more clearly that Osborne imagined the abstract form of epistolary space described in the introduction to this thesis. In a turn of thought which directly parallels Mme de Sévigné's idea of a "thick piece of crape" (quoted in Barnwell 1960, 61; see also the discussion of this idea in the introduction) separating her and her daughter whilst they write to each other, Osborne addresses (the outside of) a letter of March 1654 as follows:

For your Master

when your Mistress pleases

what makes that dash

between us

All else is but a circle

Parker makes no reference to the puzzling nature of this address beyond saying that: "it seems that letters to W. T. at this time were transmitted via Nan Stacy" (1987, 364); more than likely drawing on G. C. Moore Smith's asseveration that: "The person to whom Temple was master and Dorothy was mistress was no doubt Nan, who, as Dorothy has assumed at the beginning of the letter, was to forward Temple's letters to him while he was in Ireland" (1928, 280).¹⁵ Both of these explanations imply that the principal 'addressee' of this address is Nan Stacy. And yet to my mind



the address is an oblique message to Temple. The “dash” is something that separates the “Master” and the “Mistress”, what “makes” it is the distance between them: a distance about which Osborne is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand it is what separates her from Temple; but on the other it is what allows her to write letters and so to have a kind of access to the urban culture that she valued. Moreover, Osborne cannot but have wondered about the consequences of the removal (by marriage) of the “dash between” them: at the different relation that she would then be forced to adopt to Temple. For as Elaine Hobby notes of the period:

Women were under no illusion that, however much they might care for their husbands, once they were married their relationship would change from the courtship pattern of ‘mistress’ and ‘servant’ to man and wife ... It is no idle enquiry ... when [Osborne] asks [Temple] how he would treat someone over whom he had absolute power: that was to be his future relationship to her. (1988, 4)

And indeed, just before she had written the cryptic address, at the end of her letter of March 1654, Osborne had been speaking with some trepidation of the enormity of that impending union: “I durst trust your ffortune alone rather then now that mine is Joyned with it, yet I will hope yours may bee soe good as to overcome the ill of mine and shall indeavor to mend my owne all I can by striveing to deserve it may bee better” (190).

If Osborne did directly imagine some form of epistolary space, then what exactly was its nature? Ruth Perry notes that:

Letters were an important line of communication with the outside world at this time when women led rather cloistered lives. Men lived gregariously, in the company of their fellows in the coffee houses and inns of the city ... Not so with women. They were excluded from those centers of social exchange because it was not considered respectable for them to appear in public places. (1980, 69)

Yet nowhere does Perry accept that for women letters might have acted as a means of access to such centres of social exchange as existed; rather than as “a particularly potent medium for fantasy” (104). For Perry the gradual development of capitalism

during this period required the demeaning of the position that women had occupied since the Middle Ages; and she specifically uses the example of Osborne as a proof of a trend of the period towards ensuring “the dependence and childlike status of women” (31). Letters, then, merely symbolize for women “the frustration of their desires” (94). Perry argues that the epistolary novel emerged as a kind of panacea when the growth of capitalism had ensured that certain women “no longer participated in the means of production of the society” (138); it functioned as a means of filling “the empty lives of middle and upper class women” (138). To my mind such speculation is the result of Perry’s questionable earlier insight into the motivations for increased letter writing in the period: “This impulse to write autobiographically ... comes out of the older Puritan tradition of noting the facts of an individual’s life ... diaries and journals” (64).¹⁶ For such a reading ignores Clare Brant’s repeated observation in her work on real letters of a “recurrent pattern of apology and self-disparagement”; so that “in letters between friends, correspondents are often cautious about foregrounding themselves as subjects ... [whereas] epistolary novels avoid this problem by assuming that readers are sufficiently interested in characters to excuse their writing predominantly of their own feelings” (1987, 14 and 17). In other words letters are very different to Puritan autobiographical writings: they reach out and attempt to establish contacts and are prepared to compromise analysis of themselves in order to do so. The increased use of letters during the years after the King’s death is in fact clearly related to that “wider cultural revolution” (1987, 25) noted by Colin Campbell; whereby the traditionally puritanical ‘production ethic’ was gradually mirrored by the growth of an ethic of consumption, in order that the coming industrial revolution be provided with markets for its goods. And indeed there is very little in Osborne’s letters which resembles the puritan impulse as described by John Morrill, which “meant ripping out altar rails, taking hammers to stone statues, carved roof bosses and images in glass” (1991b, 54). Rather, Osborne’s impulse was towards the luxury of uninhibited consumption of the new postal services. Her marked predilection for gossip, her devotion to the ceremonialism of the Book of Common Prayer¹⁷, and her often anarchic humour point to a well developed anti-puritan streak. A favourite phrase in her letters is “to

bee sober now" (58); implying that previously she has been anything but sober. Again, an examination of the manuscripts reveals ample evidence of the use of lavish seals; as indicative of the attitude Osborne has to her letters. On 'BL 32-3', 'BL 76' and 'BL 78-9' a female figure with bare arms, possibly an archer, can be seen in classical dress; 'BL 57-8' has a figure in a hat; 'BL 74-5' has a woman riding a dolphin; and 'BL 94-5' shows traces of an elaborate coat of arms. Again, Osborne often writes in a language of debts and payments as if she is exchanging luxuries with Temple rather than letters: "This ... will bee Enough to answer yours, which is not very long this weeke, and I am growne so provident that I will not lay out more then I receive" (46). Indeed far from being solitary exercises in self-examination, Osborne's letters form a version of epistolary space which falls into line with the process whereby women of the period used, usually as an alternative to the publication of writing, "Bodies, theatres, courts and courtrooms ... as symbolic sites of display" (Brant and Purkiss 1992, 9). Whatever else Osborne's epistolary space was, it was not puritan.¹⁸

Nor was it particularly Royalist or Cavalier in nature. Potter notes that the genres of plays and romances: "belonged specifically to the royalists, and ... were equally specifically the targets for satire by parliamentarians ... Simply to write in either form was to make a statement about one's relation to the party in power" (1989, 74). Hence by the early 1650s a poet such as Henry Vaughan (in his *Silex Scintillans*) engages in what Graham Parry describes as "the pastoral evocation of the Caroline summer", as a means of helping "to mitigate the experience of defeat" (1989, 84 and 85). On the contrary, as I have already demonstrated, Osborne evokes pastoral largely in order to mock it or to infect it with the mores of the new metropolitan culture. Osborne has often been labelled as strongly influenced by, and an inveterate reader of, French romances.¹⁹ For example, James Fitzmaurice and Martine Rey argue that from a reading of her letters Osborne at least partly emerges as a: "heroine derived from romance"; behaving "Like a heroine from fiction" (1989, 154 and 157). In respect of the "range of notable work" that appeared in the 1640s in Cavalier poetry, Parry notes that:

Many of the poems in the collections by [Thomas] Carew, [Edmund] Waller, and [Robert] Herrick must ... have had a somewhat dated air, for they belonged mainly to the 1630s, or even to the 1620s, and preserved the generous, civilized, complimentary manner that had prevailed in the courtly world. Discussions of the good life, of the niceties of love ... which had sustained poetry through the serene Caroline years, must have had a considerable nostalgic appeal when they were published in the 1640s. (1989, 83)

Osborne was very little affected by this mood of nostalgia, despite the number of romances she read (which she explicitly associated with idleness).²⁰ In fact, she rarely missed a chance to mock the values and conventions of romance or of the courtly world. When Temple suggests that they agree a somewhat improvident marriage settlement Osborne argues that she will not agree to anything which she can only defend by saying it was, "an act of great kindnesse and something Romance, but must confesse it had nothing of prudence, discretion, nor sober counsell in't" (172). This despite the fact that Fitzmaurice and Rey argue that, "Affection based upon shared responsibility, 'kindness,' was her *sine qua non*" (1989, 151).²¹ Osborne repeatedly mocks the string of suitors presented to her by her family in lieu of Temple in terms of the outdated fashions of the courtly world: she speaks of "my Knights strange Name" (48); of "an Old Knight [killed by the cold] that I have bin wayteing for this seven yeare" (57); of "a faire [and therefore ridiculous] Lady" (71); of "my fighting Servant" (84); of "an old rich Knight" (87); and of a suitor who:

is resolved to bee a most Romance Squire and goe in quest of some enchanted Damzell, whome if hee likes, as to her person, (for fortune is a thing below him & wee doe not reade in History that any knight, or squire, was ever soe discourteous as to inquire what portions their Lady's had) then hee comes with the Power of the County to demande her ... (80)

There is deep sarcasm here; as if Osborne is feigning disappointment at her string of lovers because none of them live up to the courtly ideal. But it is quite clear that she herself did not believe in this ideal. In fact Osborne specifically mocks Temple's attachment to a portrait of Dorothy Sidney (Lady Sunderland): "I have sent you my Picture because you wisht for it, but pray let it not presume to disturbe my Lady Sunderlands, put it in some Corner where noe Ey's may finde it out" (146). Sidney

specifically exemplified the ideal of the courtly beloved, “reputedly the ‘Sacharissa’ of the poet Edmund Waller” (Parker 1987, 274).²² Osborne never seems to tire of mocking her as well in her habit of wearing seals about her neck as in that: “my Lady Sunderland is not to bee followed in her marryeng fashion ... she has lost by it much of the repute she has gained, by keeping her self a widdow” (53).²³ Again, Osborne writes of the exiled Royalist John Byron’s love poems as “poore” argument to use against her brother’s lack of belief in the constancy of “Passion” and as “these Pittifull Verses of my Lord Biron to his wife” (133); she even refers to the “great disorder” in the forty years’ marriage of Robert and the elder Dorothy Sidney, and the resulting despoliation of the ideal of the courtly residence (as celebrated by such poets as Ben Jonson): “they say hee has turned away almost every servant in the house and left her at Penshurst to disgest [*sic*] it as she can” (138).

Bearing in mind Osborne’s feelings about the ideals of romance and courtly love it is difficult to know how to read her much quoted comment, made just after she and Temple had reaffirmed their engagement after a painful split, as follows: “can there bee a more Romance Story then ours would make if the conclusion should prove happy” (164). There seems to be no hint of sarcasm here; and indeed the comment has usually been interpreted in only one way. Parker notes that “few stories outside the realms of imaginative literature can match that of the love affair between Dorothy Osborne and William Temple” (1987, 1); and F. L. Lucas sees Osborne and Temple as “lovers [that] were crossed from the first, like another Romeo and Juliet” (1934, 153). Yet other commentators have stumbled in their attempt to read such a story in the letters. Moore Smith notes that: “Many readers of Dorothy’s letters will look to them in vain for the endearing terms associated with modern love-letters” (1928, xxxvi). For in fact Osborne is far more often than not pragmatic and businesslike in her dealings with Temple rather than lover-like: “if my name can doe you any service, I shall not scruple to trust you with that” (64, her ‘proposal’); “Heer then I declare ... that I will never marry any Other, and that iff Ever Our fortun’s will allow us to marry you shall dispose mee as you please” (166, her reaffirmation of the proposal). Indeed at the start of the correspondence Osborne speaks of marriage as “a misfortune that cannot bee avoyded” (48); and declares herself “much out of love

with a thing calld marriage" (42). There is, then, the sense that Temple is the man she chooses, under great pressure from her family to marry, when she realises that she has no choice *but* to marry; rather than the man she chooses entirely of her own free will. For there is no reason to suspect that "endearing terms" are absent from other love-letters of the period as Moore Smith seems to suggest. For example in 1630 the Puritan John Winthrop writes to his wife: "I long for the time when I may see thy sweet face again ... So I kiss my sweet wife"; and in 1645, in exile in Paris at the court of Queen Henrietta Maria, Margaret Cavendish writes ardently to her future husband as follows:

my loue ... I loue all that is good, and loueing nothing aboue you I have loues recompens. My lord, I haue not had much expereanse of the world, yet I haue found it such as I could willinly part with it, but sence I knew you, I fear I shall loue it too well, becaus you are in it, and yet, me thinkes, you are not in it, because you are not of it, a strong enchantment, but pray loue so as you may haue me long, for I shall euer be, my lord, your most humble seruant. (quoted in Kermode and Kermode 1995, 27 and 35-6)

Nor, in his single surviving letter to Osborne, does Temple show himself averse to a rather pompous expression of the nobility of courtly love: "Tis no vanity this, but a true sense of how pure and how refine a nature my passion is, which none can ever know besides my owne heart unles you finde it out by beeing there" (quoted in Parker 1987, 228). Osborne herself shunned such utterances. In the instance quoted in which Osborne does refer to her "Romance Story", context is all important. For this is the letter written immediately after the patch-up of the breakdown in relations between the two, which had left Osborne vulnerable and depressed: "Tis but an howr since you went" (163). As such there is the sense that Osborne is feeding Temple's fantasies at this point, just this once; Temple, after all, having been a writer of romances himself in his youth.

Inwood notes that: "the Puritan decade was a time of change, but change towards, rather than away from, greater individual freedom" (1998, 237). It is my contention that Osborne was involved in this "change" in her attempt to open up a new form of space in which to participate in the exciting metropolitan culture that was developing at the time. She did not want actually to change anything herself by

means of her imaginations of epistolary space—just to experience in some way those changes that were already taking place. But, as in any attempt to do something new, the experience was fraught with danger. And so in a letter of December 1653 Osborne loses her nerve and attempts to break her engagement with Temple as only so much “Vanity and Vexation of Spirritt” (151), and consequently to close down the version of epistolary space that she has created. In a vivid visualisation of the means by which their engagement has so far been conducted—the exchange of letters to and from London—Osborne notes that “wee have lived hitherto upon hopes soe Aïrye that I have often wonderd how they could support the weight of our misfortunes” (152). Ostensibly, Osborne is breaking off the engagement because she can see no future in such an unrealistic proposal; but in fact there was a more pressing reason. For news of their engagement had started to get out and to be interpreted in a bad light: word that they had been exchanging letters without the knowledge of their respective families. In a letter reaffirming her desire that the engagement be broken, Osborne writes miserably: “I hear from all people that I know part of my unhappy Story and from some that I doe not know. A Lady whose face I never saw sent it mee as news she had out of Ireland” (160). Quoting Juan Luis Vives, Kate Aughterson draws attention to just how vulnerable a woman was in this respect: “nothing is more tender than is the fame and estimation of women, nor nothing more in danger of wrong: insomuch that it hath been said, and not without a cause, to hang by a cobweb” (1995, 71). Crucially, it is at just this point in the manuscript of this letter that Osborne can be seen becoming recklessly profligate of writing paper as she never is at other times. Usually, she writes upon every available surface of a piece of paper: breaking up words and carrying them on to the next line, cross-writing, and even writing over the top of crossings out. But here the size of her handwriting increases dramatically and she sets her words out as if they were in verse, leaving huge empty margins:

I can hear nothing of that letter
but I hear from all people that
I know part of my unhappy Story
and from some that I doe not know
a Lady whose face I never saw

sent it mee as news she had out of Ireland.
(BL 33975 74-5)

Clearly, this unprecedented use of space in a letter—not represented in any printed text of the letters—signals that Osborne was under stress at this point: not at the thought of losing Temple but at the thought of being ridiculed as she ridicules many others in the course of her letters.

During the same period, in some confusion as a result of Temple's entreaties not to break off the engagement, Osborne famously declares that:

I have noe End's nor noe designes nor will my heart ever bee capable of any, but like a Country wasted by a Civill warr, where two opposeing Party's have disputed theire right soe long till they have made it worth neither of theire conquest's, tis Ruin'd and desolated by the long striffe within it to that degree as twill bee usefull to none ... (156)

But in fact Osborne elides her own part in this "Civill war": which is fought between her own desire to open up a new space and her own guilt at doing so in the face of her family and of a disapproving society at large.²⁴ In many ways, then, it is a civil war which, like that which took place between 1642 and 1649, can be seen as between the attractions of London and the enforced dullness of the provinces. An example of the "striffe" in which Osborne is involved can be found in her attitude to the writings of Margaret Cavendish. In a letter of April 1653 she writes:

let mee aske you if you have seen a book of Poems newly come out, made by my Lady New Castle for God sake if you meet with it send it mee, they say tis ten times more Extravagant then her dresse. Sure the poore woman is a litle distracted, she could never bee soe ridiculous else as to venture at writeing book's and in verse too. If I should not sleep this fortnight I should not come to that. (75)

And later on she notes that: "You need not send mee lady Newcastles book at all for I have seen it, and am sattisfyed that there are many soberer People in Bedlam, i'le swear her friends are much to blame to let her goe abroade" (79). This antipathy combined with a strong desire to see the book evinces a strange ambivalence. Moreover, the strength of her reaction can perhaps be linked to the fact that Osborne

was more than faintly aware that to send a letter into epistolary space was itself a form of publication.²⁵

In their examination of the writing of letters by women during the period, Maureen Bell, George Parfitt and Simon Shepherd note that the “private letter enacts women’s habituation to the ‘private’ domain, but simultaneously provides a frame within which women’s language can take control” (1990, 271). Eventually Osborne is not comfortable in taking even this modicum of control; as just about the only place that it could be taken from was her own family. And so she is never entirely happy in sending letters; unlike, for instance, the heroine of Richardson’s novel *Clarissa*. In a letter of July 1653 she writes: “how much more satisfied should I bee if there were noe need of these, and wee might talke all that wee write and more, shall wee Ever bee soe happy” (107). It would be hard to imagine *Clarissa* ever expressing the same view; at least not without soon retracting it. The breakdown in relations between Osborne and Temple was a clear turning-point in the history of this early set of extant love-letters. After the two are reconciled Osborne accepts that she will very soon be married and works towards closing down her imaginations of epistolary space: “only you would doe mee a great pleasure if you could forbear writeing unlesse it were somtimes on great occasions. This is a strange request for mee to make that have bin fonder of your letters then my Lady Protector is of her new honnour ... but there are a thousand inconveniencys int” (167). Just the sorts of social “inconveniencys”, in fact, that I have already shown were experienced by both Morgan and Lewis Carroll. For at this point Osborne is no longer prepared to risk ending up like the imprudent “Poore Lady Anne Blunt ... the talk of all the footmen and Boy’s in the street, and will bee company for them shortly” (155). For this reason, at least until much later in life when she was reputed to have had a regular correspondence with Queen Mary as well as with Katharine Philips, Osborne chose to forgo the access to metropolitan culture which she had enjoyed in the epistolary space that had been set up between herself and Temple; and for the same reason Virginia Woolf laments the loss of “the letters that Dorothy did not write” (1932, 66). Because she gives it up I see only glimmerings of epistolary space in Osborne’s

letters; possibilities that were opened up by other letter writers during the rest of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century.

REFERENCES

¹ Homer Woodbridge argues that a passage from one of Temple's early essays "suggests that Temple was regularly corresponding with Dorothy while he was at Brussels. 'I have been all this day,' he says, 'or rather all this year, upon such leaden minutes has it rolled away, in an excess of perplexity about the miscarriage of a letter'" (1940, 25-6). But although it is probable that Temple and Osborne did exchange one or more letters sometime before December 1652, it is not likely that they had a very regular or familiar correspondence before that date. If they did then why were none of Osborne's earlier letters lovingly preserved by Temple in the manner of the later ones?

² To attempt such a reading might at first seem perverse in the light of previous readings of Osborne's letters, almost all of which emphasize their non-metropolitan, no-nonsense, and individualistic nature. For example Maurice Hewlett concludes that "There is no sign that [Osborne] was the least bit 'blue,' though she read the books of that *coterie*"; and explains away perceived deficiencies in comparison to the letters of de Sévigné with the remark that "Chicksands [the Osborne family estate] was not Paris" (1924, 237 and 241). Likewise, Lyn Irvine concludes that Osborne was "deep and sincere, and, to my knowing, the most charming person that has ever lived; yet limited, narrow, even uncivilized. In a sense there is very little in her letters, beyond her nonpareil self, while the whole world crowds into those of Mme de Sévigné" (1932, 97); F. L. Lucas that Osborne's "charm is essentially that of a very delicate and sensitive personality ... but how ill-read and ignorant she would be thought by many a modern miss!" (1934, 172-3); and Sophia Blaydes that Osborne "is revealed as a gentle, unpretentious woman" (1988, 355). My aim, however, is to show that previous readings of Osborne's letters are inadequate.

³ All quotations from Osborne's letters to Temple are taken from Parker (1987), and followed by a page number in brackets.

⁴ Describing events of the early 1660s, Woodbridge notes that: "One of Dorothy's newer friends of this time was Katherine Philips ... Philips spent a year in Ireland, most of it in Dublin, beginning in June, 1662, and her recent biographer thinks she probably met the Temples there. In a long letter of January, 1664, signed 'Orinda,' Mrs Philips speaks of earlier letters in such a way as to suggest a regular correspondence ... 'yet I should never attain mortification enough to be able willingly to deny myself the great entertainment of your correspondence'" (1940, 62). If such a correspondence did take place then it has since been lost.

⁵ London's Hyde Park, as Parker points out, was first opened in 1632. By 1661 its reputation was well established. In her recent historical novel, *Restoration*, Rose Tremain has her hero declare that: "Several afternoons, I would walk in Hyde Park, with the purpose only of snaffling and leading to what I call the Act of Oblivion some plump whore—when I should have been at lectures" (1989, 18-19). From the evidence of Osborne's letters it does not seem that this function of the park suffered any alteration during the Interregnum.

⁶ Kate Aughterson quotes from Juan Luis Vives' *The instruction of a Christian woman* to illustrate the proscriptions that would have been placed on any Renaissance woman determined to experience London: "Forth she must needs go sometimes, but I would it should be as selde as maybe, for many causes. Principally because as oft as a maid goeth forth among people, so often she cometh in judgement and extreme peril of her beauty, honesty, demureness, wit, shamefastness and virtue ... Nay, verily, they shall go forth sometime, if need require, and if their father command or their mother: but afore she go forth at door, let her prepare her mind and stomach none otherwise than if she went to fight" (1995, 71-2). With the Puritans in control it is unlikely that such views would have mellowed by Osborne's time.

⁷ Nigel Smith, however, reads Osborne's comments differently and notes that her encounter "did nothing, it would seem, to dissuade her of the scurrility and unreliability of the newsbook" (1994, 69).

⁸ A charge later echoed by Bishop Burnet who accused Temple "of being an Epicurean, both in principle and practice" (quoted in Parker 1987, 354).

⁹ Fisher draws attention to what he terms "James [I]'s famous and ungallant outburst against 'Those swarms of gentry who, through the instigation of their wives and to new model and fashion their daughters (who, if they were unmarried marred their reputations, and if married lost them), neglect their country hospitality and are a burden to the city and a general nuisance to the kingdom'" (1968, 84). Rather than beginning in the eighteenth century then (as Campbell contends) the development of modern fashion would seem to be associated with the first rapid growth of cities such as London.

¹⁰ Graham Parry notes that by "the mid-1640s the Caroline cultural élite had crossed over to Paris, where they regrouped around Queen Henrietta Maria, who maintained an impoverished court at St. Germain" (1989, 90).

¹¹ Parker notes that this was "a church near the south side of old St Paul's, destroyed in the Great Fire" (1987, 363).

¹² And indeed the critical consensus on the *Letters to Sir William Temple* remains that such letters could not have been written at an earlier date: that they are somehow different from any letters written before. For example, C. V. Wedgwood argues that: "had [Dorothy Osborne] lived half a century earlier, not all her spontaneous charm and taste could have helped her to string sentences with such a natural ease" (1950, 105); whilst Virginia Woolf notes that: "Had she been born in 1827, Dorothy Osborne would have written novels; had she been born in 1527, she would never have written at all" (1932, 60).

¹³ See for example Robinson (1948, 42).

¹⁴ Parker speculates that the "White-hart" might have been a "public house where letters for Ireland could be left" (1987, 369); but he does not consider what type of public house it might have been. In retrospect Osborne wished that she had not bothered "the woman of the house" about her letter "considering how little the letter deserved it twas writt in such disorder the company prateing about mee and some of them soe bent on doeing mee little mischeifs that I knew not what I did" (198). Would the company have been quite so unused to the sight of a woman in an inn? Surely not. To my mind it seems more likely that this "house" was in fact a coffee house. Dobranski lists coffee houses under this name as in existence in London at

the time; and indeed coffee houses were much used as *postes restantes* in the eighteenth century. If so, then this attempt to make use of a coffee house in order peacefully to write a letter would surely have discouraged Osborne from ever making such an attempt again; serving as another example of her lack of uninhibited access to the services of the city, and turning her ever more in the direction of the imagination and use of epistolary space.

¹⁵ In his edition Edward Parry merely appends a footnote made necessary by the fact that he has not transcribed the address in its entirety: "Miss Lewis says 'dash' evidently alludes to a stroke of the pen separating 'Master' from 'Mistress'" (1914, 226).

¹⁶ Elspeth Graham *et al* also assimilate Osborne into the process of "The development of autobiography in the seventeenth century and the subsequent rise of the novel"; and refer to her letters as one example of the "wide variety of genres [that] came to be used to write extensively about personal beliefs or activities" (1989, 1).

¹⁷ John Morrill notes that at the time it was a "criminal offence to use" (1991b, 50) this Book.

¹⁸ Osborne's letters have often been associated with the rise of a 'puritanical' plain style of prose writing: as in her comment that, "All Letters mee thinks should bee free and Easy as ones discourse, not studdyed, as an Oration, nor made up of hard words like a Charme. Tis an admirable thing to see how some People will labour to find out term's that may Obscure a plaine sence" (131). Yet, as Shirley Eachus notes, such a style may also be seen as luxurious and playful, "graceful and rhythmic" (1989, 520).

¹⁹ Smith notes that "genres were implicated in the national conflict. In particular, prose romance became very largely the possession of the Royalists, but with the regicide, Arcadian romance structure was understood demonstrably to have failed, and the new French forms of romance, incorporating the autobiographical device of *le récit* were imported" (1994, 11).

²⁰ Osborne usually treats the reading of romances with contempt, and the books themselves as mere time-fillers. For example she omits sending Temple volumes of Calprenède's *Cleopatra* with the rationale that he cannot possibly want them in London; whereas "heer [at Chicksands] they may bee welcome to you for want of better Company" (57). In a later letter Osborne changes her mind and writes, "since you are at Leasure to consider the moone you may bee enough to reade *Cleopatra*" (59). Nor did Osborne think better of the writing of romances. She complains at the length of the letters that Temple is sending her from Ireland in the following terms: "never trust mee if I write more then you that live in a desolated Country where you might ffinish a Romance of ten Tomes before any body interrupted you" (206).

²¹ Again Osborne notes that "I have noe patience for our *faiseurs de Romance*, when they make women court"; because: "the Ladys are all soe *kinde* they make noe sport" (180 and 179, my italics).

²² In his description of Temple's boyhood visits to Penshurst, Woodbridge describes how Temple "fell boyishly in love with Lady Dorothy, 'Sacharissa,' whose beauty had already been made famous by Waller's poems" (1940, 7). Osborne herself refers

to Waller, but only in order to doubt his poetic powers truly to represent without the introduction of "a great deal of pleasing fiction" a picture of "Our Warr's" (132).

²³ Dorothy Sidney, following her marriage to Mr Smith, was the "Lady" whom I have already shown Osborne mocking for taking fashion to extremes.

²⁴ In his examination of Osborne's Shakespearean allusions, Charles Whitney draws out the extent of the pressure which Osborne must have been under when he notes that one of her "simile[s] suggests a link between Ricardian usurpation and familial insubordination" (1996, 15).

²⁵ Hobby notes that throughout the period the prevailing ideology was that "Women were not supposed to enter the public world in any form, and that prohibition extended to a ban on 'making public' their words" (1988, 1).

Chapter Two. "I have been so long absent from Court": Sir George Etherege's Personal and Business Letters, a Courtly Enclave in Epistolary Space (1685-89)

261. *LETTERS*.—A letter is an unannounced visit, and the postman is the intermediary of impolite surprises. Every week we ought to have one hour for receiving letters, and then go and take a bath. (Nietzsche 1911, 322)

319. *A GOOD LETTER WRITER*.—A person who does not write books, thinks much, and lives in unsatisfying society, will usually be a good letter-writer. (Nietzsche 1909, 272)

In recent times the restoration of the Stuart monarchy that took place in May 1660 and the subsequent reigns of both Charles II and his brother James II have come to be seen as "an uneasy, brief settlement within longer-term political negotiations" (MacLean 1995, 3). For example, John Miller notes ominously that it now "appears that all the great issues of seventeenth-century English history had not, after all, been settled by 1660" (1985, vii).¹ No longer is the Restoration viewed as "a chronicle of wasted time" (Jones 1979, 1); and instead the thesis has even been advanced that "the Restoration settlement created the basis for a potentially viable and lasting regime" (Miller 1985, viii). In such a situation in which everything is at stake there is clearly everything to fight for. Consequently, attention to the Restoration now tends to focus not on images of merry monarchs and on "the cheers, the bells and the bonfires" (Roots 1992, 40) that greeted Charles on his return to London; but on images of the slow decomposition of the disinterred and staked heads of Cromwell and Ireton atop the Tower of London. My attention to this period falls into line with and even confirm this trend. It focuses not on the "[Restoration Court] Wits' epistolary jollity ... a pose *à la mode*" (Wilson 1948, 80) in which "every letter [is a] ... cynical ... bawdy ... mask of banter" (Wilson 1941, viii); but on a climate in which almost everyone had excellent "grounds to worry about what they were writing and to be afraid of the regime reading their correspondence" (Marshall 1994, 84). For this reason I view Restoration letters as far less likely to entertain and to delight and,

following the first epigraph to this chapter, far more likely to contain ‘impolite surprises’ delivered in the course of ‘unannounced visits.’

With the possible exception of the Exclusion Crisis (1678-81) at no point was Restoration instability more acute than during what Geoffrey Holmes refers to as “James [II]’s long sojourn in cloud-cuckoo land” (1993, 187). Amidst a climate of heightened fears of absolutism and popery James made a series of disastrous u-turns as he sought to “secure the election of a Dissenting Parliament ... [in order to achieve] the promotion of Catholicism” (Miller 1979, 37). Just as happened during the crackdown against Dissent that Charles II ordered after the Rye House Plot of 1683, James’s policies inevitably contributed to the formation of a sizeable underground opposition and:

The result was a clandestine form of political warfare which took place in the taverns, alleys and streets of London and then spilled over into the territory of the Dutch Republic as the Restoration crisis deepened and numerous refugees fled the country. (Marshall 1994, 73)

In this chapter I argue that this form of warfare also extended into the imaginary realm of epistolary space that I have described earlier; whose existence during the Restoration Cynthia Wall fleetingly acknowledges in her description of the new “abstract spaces produced by public credit, the postal system, [and] the new network of roads” (1998, 104). I do so with reference to the personal and business letters of the playwright Sir George Etherege; who from 1685 to 1689 was diplomatic resident at the Imperial Diet in “the staid capital of Ratisbon” (Huseboe 1987, 47).² All but one of the letters that I consider are written from Ratisbon to London. I have considered letters written to some forty eight addressees including John Dryden, the Earl of Dorset, and the Duke of Buckingham. The most important of these addressees—receiving the vast bulk of the letters from Ratisbon—are the Earls of Middleton and Sunderland, James II’s two Secretaries of State: “the key figures involved in giving advice, corresponding with diplomats abroad, and implementing royal policy decisions” (Davies 1997, 216). T. G. S. Cain and Ken Robinson note that a schism, “Something akin to party strife ... has entered deep into the world of literature by the 1660s ... with Milton, Marvell and Bunyan on one side, the outside

(or in Bunyan's case the inside of Bedford jail) and such writers as Dryden, Sedley and Etherege on the other" (1992, 11). I argue that Etherege only belatedly realises that his position on the inside, as a Royalist and as a closet Catholic, is tenuous; and indeed that his use of epistolary space as a courtly enclave in the service of James II is potentially as dangerous as the use of any other space; and that as a result he loses one of the first 'wars' to take place in epistolary space to a group of unknown enemies headed by his own personal secretary in Ratisbon, the rabidly puritanical Hugo Hughes.

The maturation of the Restoration Post Office

Renewed interest and investment in the Post Office after the Restoration was bound to foster increased imaginations of epistolary space; and so to increase the likelihood that instabilities inherent in the new regime would be communicated to that realm. Charles returned from his long exile almost penniless. Although he was very quickly granted the revenue from "the customs, tonnage and poundage, for life" (Miller 1985, 20) these funds were very quickly spent in paying off and thus dispersing the dangerous remnants of the New Model Army. Charles duly complained of his condition and:

a committee was set up to consider his revenue ... the House resolved without a division that the king needed a regular annual revenue of £1,200,000. It also accepted the committee's recommendation that bills be brought in to regulate the post office, the Crown lands and the sale of wine licences, with a view to maximising the income from these sources and so minimising the amount that would have to be raised by taxation. (Miller 1985, 20-1)

That the Post Office was considered to have so much potential for profit is significant in itself; that this potential was very speedily embodied in a bill and then an Act is even more so. This was necessary because the:

"pretended" Post Office Act of 1657 was not recognised [and] ... As a result, the Convention Parliament of 1660 ... passed an act "for erecting and establishing a Post Office" ... The Act of 1660, which "legally settled" the

Post Office, became the first of a long series of laws for the regulation of postal matters. It is so fundamental that it became known as the Post Office Charter. (Robinson 1948, 48)

In fact, the Act “became the foundation charter of an organization that was to continue henceforth without any break” (Robinson 1964, 24). Thus the permanence that I have already suggested as necessary for the imagination of epistolary spaces was finally established, after a series of disruptions of any ordinary carriage of the mails during the Civil Wars, Commonwealth, Protectorate, and the vacuum of power that was a result of the fall of Richard Cromwell in 1659.

Holmes identifies the scale of the changes brought about, in large part, by the Act of 1660 when he notes that the “employees of the Post Office probably quadrupled in the years from 1650 to 1714, much of the increase coming after 1685” (1993, 260). Again:

The Restoration saw the introduction of additional branch roads and of cross-road connections ... These additions were tending to make the ill-shaped wheel of the main post roads into a web of routes that would in time gossamer the whole land. (Robinson 1948, 65)

Another result was an increase in cross-Channel traffic: whereas before 1660 the “Dover packets were the only recognized carriers ... going to Calais for the services to and from France, and to Flanders to connect with the widely spread Imperial posts of the Counts of Tour and Tassis”, after that date the “Continental services went twice a week—to Calais for France on Mondays and Thursdays, to Dunkirk for Flanders on Mondays and Fridays, and to the Netherlands by way of Harwich on Tuesdays and Fridays” (Robinson 1964, 26 and 25). It was as a result of such improvements that Etherege was able to keep in touch with London, almost without fail, twice a week during the whole period of his residence at Ratisbon. As Robinson notes, the “second foreign route, between Harwich and the Netherlands, began as a regular service in 1660”; as an alternative which the Dutch preferred to “the doubtful security of the Imperial post through Flanders” (1964, 27). The English too were more likely to prefer sending letters through the Netherlands. Not only had Arlington in 1668 secured with Amsterdam “the provision that the mails should be carried in

English packet-boats”; but the “handling of English mail by the French Post Office ... caused much dissatisfaction, both as to the proportion of the postage desired by the French, and as to the manner in which English letters were forwarded through France” (28 and 26). In particular English merchants doing business in Spain were “disgusted with the slow carriage of their Spanish letters” (26). All this despite the fact that the French themselves were involved in innovating some of the technologies of communication during the first half of the seventeenth century. Arthur Robinson and Helen Wallis note that the “earliest post-road map in France—ranking also as the earliest post-road map known—is Melchior Tavernier’s ‘Carte Géographique des Postes qui traversent la France,’ drawn by Nicolas Sanson, Paris, 1632” (1987, 64-6). This map—an edition of which is reproduced as figure 2—shows individual posts throughout France; the post leading from Calais to Dover; and even the posts from Dover to London. This innovation was mirrored in 1675 by the publication in England of the far more complex and important *Britannia* by John Ogilby: “a road atlas of the British Isles, in which particular roads are depicted in sections by means of strip maps” (Robinson and Wallis 1987, 64). It laid the foundations, as Howard Robinson notes, “for a better postal service” (1948, 63): indeed the “‘Britannia’ was the first national road-atlas of any country in Western Europe” and as such was “an immediate commercial success” (MapForum.com 1999). The atlas shows the Dover to London and the Harwich to London roads; along one of which Etherege’s letters would have completed the final stage of their journey from Ratisbon. Such mapping would undoubtedly have contributed to the speed of the carriage of letters along the routes of the posts; the laying down and visualisation of such a network to the imagination of epistolary spaces.³

During the Restoration the “days of departure from the chief continental cities and of their arrival in London ‘in periods of from 3 to 25 days’ were published” (Picard 1997, 72). Etherege himself seems to have taken advantage of all available means by which to convey his letters to London. He sends early letters “by the way of Cologne” (9) and “by Bruxells” (9); and later on he sends the same letter twice, “by Holland, and [by] an Express parting hence for Paris ... thinking by the diligence of the Express the news might be in England sooner that way” (141).⁴ As Liza



figure 2: detail from Melchior Tavernier's 'Carte Géographique des Postes qui traversent la France,' drawn by Nicolas Sanson, Paris, edition of 1676

Picard explains, by the time of the Restoration the continental postal system “covered Italy, France, Switzerland (via Geneva), Germany (via Hamburg, Cologne and Frankfurt), Flanders, Holland and even ‘Constantinople, Aleppo, and all parts of Turkey’” (1997, 73). Etherege’s eagerness to make use of all these services is clear evidence that the imaginations of epistolary space that I describe in the later sections of this chapter are a result of advances that took place in the technologies of communication during the Restoration; and consequently that such imaginations were impossible or at least unlikely before those advances were made. For without them Etherege would have been frequently frustrated in his desire to communicate with London; his imagination constantly hampered. This is evidenced by the disconsolate nature of his lament to Owen Wynne on 17th June 1686:

Sir./ I have not this weeke received any letters from England, which is a thing that touches me here as near as ever a disappointment did in London with the woman I lov’d most tenderly, but I flatter my self in this case, as I us’d to doe in the other, that it is some misfortune and not your want of Kindness has been the occasion. (42)

Such flattery can only go so far in the weight of repeated misfortune; but in fact Etherege was not too often disappointed in his expectation of regular correspondence with London and it seems that only once was it necessary to assuage Middleton’s displeasure: “If your Lordship dos not constantly receive Letters from me they must miscarry or be retarded by some accident” (20).⁵

In her analysis of the ‘metaphoric’ nature of traditionally understood closural narratives and the ‘metonymic’ nature of epistolary narratives Elizabeth MacArthur identifies “two corresponding ideals for spatial and temporal experience. Metaphor will thus refer to a valorization of the collapse of time into a perfect instant, metonymy to a valorisation of desire and expanse” (1990, 33). I view epistolary space as the figure or product of the “energy and movement” (33) of MacArthur’s metonymic form of narrative; which requires “generative energy as well as structures of meaning, [so that] real correspondences may be seen to shed light on the functioning of any narrative” (32). Because of the nature of ‘metonymic’ narrative, which “seeks to perpetuate itself and to escape final meaning” (26) MacArthur argues

that writers of letters are preoccupied most of all “with the present process of maintaining and structuring their exchange” (170). Such a preoccupation will then inevitably involve itself with—and indeed be dependent upon—the means of transmission of letters: in fact with the development of the Post Office, which began during this period to allow ever greater opportunities for maintaining and structuring regular exchange.

The struggle for control of Restoration epistolary space

There were many reasons why the Post Office should have expanded so rapidly during the Restoration period in particular: for instance Holmes notes that “war ensured the continuing and vigorous growth of the younger departments set up in the few decades before 1688: the Post Office, the Navy Office, the new Customs department, and ... the Excise” (1993, 259). There was also the question of trade which, after some initial dislocations, “was to expand during the rest of the period” (Jones 1979, 25); in fact to the point at which J. M. Ellis identifies the existence of a “commercial revolution” (1997, 192). However, Robinson has shown that the Post Office as we know it developed not out of the postal initiatives of traders such as the Merchant Adventurers and Merchant Strangers of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but rather as a result of the initiatives of the monarchy and government. Nothing had changed in that respect by the time of the Restoration. In 1663, as the Commons made its most serious attempt of the reign “to subject the king’s revenue to parliamentary scrutiny”, Charles was asked “to make no arrangements for managing the post office until the Commons had investigated the matter” (Miller 1985, 41). To no long avail, for in 1667 the Cabal member Lord Arlington became Postmaster-General; and thereafter “Growing postal profits were a royal monopoly, and the receipts were used for almost every purpose except the improvement of the service” (Robinson 1948, 53). The potential of the Post Office to generate profit was surely the key to its success; and for this reason it improved although the “government clearly had no particular desire to serve the public” (53). But there

were also other reasons for the Restoration regime to be interested in the new department.

In his recent historical novel, *Ex-Libris*, Ross King introduces us to the London of the summer of 1660, when the:

Post Office was in a state of upheaval like everything else. Already many of the old postmasters—Cromwell's busiest spies, so the rumours went—had been relieved of their positions, and the Postmaster-General, John Thurloe, was clapped up in the Tower. (1998, 7)

The novel's narrator, Isaac Inchbold, a bookseller with premises on London bridge, informs us that he "was most particular about my post, especially on Tuesdays, which was when the mail-bag from Paris arrived by packet-boat" (6); and that as such he was in the habit of sending his servant regularly to "the General Letter Office in Clock Lane" (6). On the particular Tuesday on which the action of the novel begins Inchbold's "letter ... bore the green stamp of the Inland Office rather than the red one of the Foreign Office. This was peculiar, because domestic mail arrived at the General Letter Office on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays" (7). The peculiarity of this delay leads Inchbold to examine the seal and to decide that, "someone had moulded [Lady Marchamont's] original wax seal, broken it, then closed it with shellac impressed by a counterfeit seal" (10). He then remembers "rumours that letter-openers and copyists worked out of the top floor of the General Letter Office" (10); and laments that Lady Marchamont should "have entrusted her correspondence to a means of conveyance as famously unscrupulous as the Post Office" (10). Thus King succeeds in introducing an atmosphere of intrigue, bedevilment and conflict into his novel by the merest mention of the new department.

Immediate control of epistolary space was vital for any regime that hoped to rule England after the 1650s. So, after the fall of Richard Cromwell, the figure of John Thurloe—formerly so important to Oliver Cromwell—is seen in the shadows of the opening entries of Samuel Pepys' diary: for example on 2nd March 1660: "I went early to my Lord at Mr Crewe's where I spoke to him. Here were a great many come to see him, as Secretary Thurloe, who is now by the Parliament chosen again Secretary of State" (quoted in Sim 1997, 24). And although the fictional Inchbold

rightly records that Thurloe was briefly imprisoned at the start of the Restoration, Charles later, as Stuart Sim notes, unsuccessfully “solicited his services” (1997, 24); most likely as a result of his skill in dealing with the Post Office and with intelligence in general.⁶ In lieu of Thurloe Charles II at once sought out others able to fill the role that he had taken in the 1650s; John Harold Wilson even records that “the King’s first night in London was spent, not at his palace, but at the house of Sir Samuel Morland, scientist and inventor (1948, 3). This is the same Morland whom Robinson mentions in his account of “abuses” of the Post Office during the Restoration:

As might be expected, the opening of letters by government officers continued during a time when plots were rife, and Charles was determined not to go on his travels again ... the General Letter Office [contained] ... a device for the expert opening and resealing of letters ... The inventor, Samuel Morland, also declared that copies of letters of eight or ten pages could be made in as many minutes. (1948, 54)

Such inventions, directly encouraged at the highest levels—Morland was most often supervised by Arlington—help to confirm the judgement of Marshall that, “There is little doubt that the general interception of the mail during the Restoration period followed similar lines to the work undertaken by John Thurloe in the late 1650s”; and that, “In the late seventeenth century the postal service was at the forefront of the Stuart intelligence system” (1994, 83 and 78).

Nor was it only the government that was interested in establishing some degree of control over epistolary space; for there was also a “widespread use of illegal means of sending letters” (Robinson 1948, 67). Picard notes that, “‘Royal Mail’ meant what it said: from 1662, carrying letters was a monopoly reserved to the King” (1997, 72). And yet she goes on to speculate that:

The Society of Friends must have had a well-organised private postal system, since ‘the posts were so laid for the searching of letters that none could pass unsearched’, and yet their meetings, which were forbidden by law, were always known to the Friends in advance. (1997, 72)

If such a system was in existence during the Restoration then its aims would have been fairly limited. Not so the London Penny Post: the brainchild of a merchant named William Dockwra, that was set up in April 1680. Robinson notes that at the “fever point” of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, “a more inopportune time, it would seem, could hardly have been chosen for starting such a venture” (1948, 70 and 69). And yet it is likely that it was precisely the timing of Dockwra’s innovation that allowed it to prosper; albeit briefly. For as T. Todd points out:

The Post Office was a most convenient way for distributing the Whig anti-Catholic newsletters but the Whigs were far more interested in circulating their propaganda throughout London than throughout the rest of the country. What more natural, then, than that Lord Shaftesbury should have backed the scheme of William Dockwra and Robert Murray for the establishment of a London Penny Post under cover of which the Whig newsletters could be distributed rapidly throughout the whole of London and the suburbs? (1952, 10)

The Penny Post was first announced on 22 March 1679 in *Mercurius Civicus*, “one of the Whig newspapers set up by Lord Shaftesbury”; and it was “Whig propaganda money that financed the post” (14 and 18). Not only that but Dockwra’s innovation collapsed in 1682 as soon as Shaftesbury fled the country; to be taken over by the jealous Duke of York and placed in the safe hands of Arlington. The ferocity with which the future James II moved against Dockwra—“the Duke caused twenty actions to be brought against the ‘undertaker’ at one time and two more at another time, according to Dockwra’s own statement” (Robinson 1948, 74)—provides a further testament to the value placed upon control of epistolary space during the Restoration.

Etherege’s courtly enclave in epistolary space

It was to this tempestuous arena that Etherege had recourse almost as soon as he arrived in Germany in late 1685; only partly as a consequence of the fact that at the time “Embassy routine ... mainly revolved around the post days when mail came into and went out of the embassy” (Marshall 1994, 248). For he was not at all satisfied with the society that he found in Ratisbon, “this drooping place” (16-17). To the Earl

of Sunderland he complained that, "Play and women are not so much as talk'd of, and one wou'd think the Diets had made a Reichsguttachten to banish those passtimes the Citty" (17); to the Earl of Middleton that, "This place is allways as barren of pleasure as it is now of News" (25); and to the Duke of Buckingham that, "the German Ladies are so intollerably reserv'd and virtuous ... that 'tis next to an impossibility to carry on an Intrigue with them" (92). That Etherege was in such a position at all was not entirely a free choice, as Bracher points out: "Altogether, the likeliest reason for his having taken the position at Ratisbon was serious financial trouble, and a probable explanation for this is Etherege's well-known passion for gambling" (1969, 46). Marriage to a rich widow sometime between 1677 and 1679 was supposed to have put an end to such troubles; but the state of wedlock soon turned sour for Etherege, perhaps as a result of his working his way through the widow's riches rather too hastily.⁷ In 1668 Etherege had been forced to accept a similar position abroad as secretary to Sir Daniel Harvey, the Ambassador at Constantinople, and for similar reasons: he had accepted the post only in some degree of desperation after the relative failure of his second play, *She Would if She Could*.⁸ He clearly found Constantinople no more interesting than Ratisbon: "Here seldome happens any thing worthy remarke" (3). History quickly began to repeat itself in Ratisbon, where he again began idly to think too much: "If my Ghost be as restless when I am in the other world as my minde is now I am in an other Countrey, my friends must expect to be much haunted" (113). And beyond letters he was not productive, despite the fact that James II himself had communicated through Middleton his desire for another play to follow up the success of *The Man of Mode*, first performed in 1676: "The last time, Sir Fopling appear'd with the usuall applause, and the King was pleas'd to tell me that he expected you shou'd put on your socks ... This you are to consider as an Instruction" (269). Such a man in such a position—living in unsatisfying society, no longer writing plays, and thinking too much—will, according to the passage quoted from Nietzsche as the second epigraph to this chapter, usually be a good letter writer.

From a reading of his letters it appears that what troubled Etherege most during the course of residency at Ratisbon was the comparison of his present situation with that which he had enjoyed in London. He asks Sunderland:

Is it not enough to breed an ill habit of body in a man who was us'd to sit up till morning to be forc'd for want of knowing what to do with himselfe to go to bed in the Evening; one who has been us'd to live with all freedom, never to approach any body but with Ceremonie; one who has been us'd to run up and down to find out variety of Company, to sit at home, and entertaine himselfe in Solitude? (17)

The letters are littered with references to the infinitely superior society of London: to Paul Barillon Etherege speaks of the "plaisirs de Londres" (18); to Charles Boyle, Thomas Betterton, and William Jephson also of "the pleasures of London" (118, 119 and 228); to John Cooke, to "pitty me, who have been forc'd from the shoar of the delightfull Thames to be confin'd to live on the Banks of the unwholesome Danube" (163); and to Middleton of what he would do for "one night in London" (189). Hardly surprising, for as J. R. Jones notes:

A hectic and expensive metropolitan cultural life developed very rapidly after 1660, on a luxurious scale that could not be imitated in any provincial capital. In London alone there were theatres (with companies that included actresses for the first time), eating-places, coffee houses, clubs and societies, pleasure gardens, portrait painters, bookshops and printers, importers of luxury commodities, all catering for the fashionable or those who wished to pass as such. (1979, 26)

In addition, Steve Pincus argues, developments in urban culture which had begun tentatively in the 1650s proceeded apace after the Restoration with, for instance, "over eighty coffee houses in the city alone" (1995, 812) by May 1663. Perhaps of more interest to Etherege, since coffee houses were "places that celebrated sober discourse rather than inebriated play" (815), was the contemporaneous "maturing of the alehouse as an urban institution" (Borsay 1997, 180). Added to these pleasures and of even more particular interest to Etherege was the availability of "Bassett in London" (17);⁹ as also of houses in which live "those kind charming Creatures London affords, in whose Embraces I might make my self amends for so many Hours

murdered in impertinent Debates” (92). Etherege had learned to love the pleasures of the new urban culture of London very early on in his life; for, as Bracher reveals, he had been “formally admitted to Clement’s Inn on February 19, 1659” (1980, 128). In the area of London in which Clement’s Inn was situated:

by 1659 operas, “representations,” declamations, and interludes were being opened, raided and closed by the government, and reopened a few weeks later. A young gentleman walking out of his lodgings at Clement’s Inn would have encountered a theater offering sporadic performances within a quarter mile in almost any direction. (1980, 31)

With such a situation in existence over a year before May 1660, London was clearly a focus of the “pleasure-seeking values and attitudes of the Restoration Court” (MacLean 1995, 16). Hence, if only for the good of his own mental health Etherege proceeded to imagine epistolary space as an extension of, or substitute for, this metropolitan cultural life; as a courtly enclave.

That this was a conscious decision is evidenced first by Etherege’s attempts to replicate traditional courtly behaviour in epistolary space. To James Fitzjames, the illegitimate son of Arabella Churchill and James II, Etherege writes: “It is a little confident for a poor man at this distance to put in to make his Court to you with the throng of great ones who encompass you at London” (107). To Middleton he ponders how best “to make my Court to you” (175); and to the Earl of Dover he apologizes for “making my Court to you in this nature” (166). The circulation of manuscript poems was another form of traditional courtly behaviour; thus in a letter of 9th January 1687 to Middleton Etherege draws attention to “the Song I send you, the first and onely one I ever made in french” (78). This song, as Bracher points out, was addressed to a “comedienne from Nuremberg” (78)—involvement with whom caused so much trouble for Etherege in Ratisbon. Again, an element of courtly hyperbole is never far from Etherege’s manner of writing and receiving letters: to Middleton he writes, “The pleasure I had when I receiv’d your Lordships Letter is yet fresh, and I find the least marke of your favour is able to make Ratisbonne agreeable” (24); and to the Earl of Mulgrave, “Never Lover was more agreeably surpris’d with the favours of his Mistress than I have been with the letter you have done me the

honor to send me" (110). The second reason for identifying conscious decision in Etherege's imagination of epistolary space is his direct identification of himself, in a letter to John Cooke of 8th December 1687, with Ovid in exile:

My weak fancy may well suffer here, when the noble Genius of Ovid was dejected at Pontus, and you cannot but forgive the fondness I have for London shou'd I cry out when I shutt this letter: *Hei mihi, quod domino non licet ire tuo* [which Bracher translates, with the preceding line, as: "Little book—nor do I begrudge it—you will go to Rome. Alas that your master is not permitted to go"]. (163)

This imagination of the self as a letter capable of being posted—and of the joyful progress of a letter on its way to its destination—is only one instance of the importance that Etherege placed upon epistolary space during his time at Ratisbon. For imagination also worked in the opposite direction: in a letter to Middleton Etherege enclosed a poem lamenting that in Ratisbon he must "loose two degrees":

Since Love and verse as well as Wine
Are brisker where the sun doth shine,
/ ... /
Yet this I patiently cou'd bear
If the Rough Danube's Beauties were
But onely two degrees less faire
Than the Kind Nymphs of gentle Thames,
Who warme me hither with their beames.
Such power they have they can dispense
Five hundred Miles their Influence.
(32)

Somewhere in this vividly imagined space of five hundred miles, across all those poor roads and supported by a series of messengers, Etherege sets up his courtly enclave.

The enclave was densely populated. Although John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, had long been dead by the time Etherege reached Ratisbon, his correspondents there included George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham; Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset (formerly known as Lord Buckhurst); John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave; and Henry Guy; all of whom are mentioned by John Harold Wilson as

belonging to what he terms the 'Court Wits': "a kind of loose fraternity of men of kindred tastes" (1948, 8). To Buckingham Etherege writes that he should "wonder not if I afford my self the Satisfaction of conversing with you by way of Letters, (the only Relief I have left me to support your Absence at this distance) as often as I can find an opportunity" (92). The names of other members of the former circle are frequently to be found in the letters—as if Etherege were trying to recreate the circle in epistolary space long after it had disintegrated in reality. Again to Buckingham he complains, "And when I come home spent and weary from the Diet, I have no Lord D[orset]'s, or Sir Charles S[edley]'s to sport away the Evening with" (92); and to William Jephson he remembers "My poor Lord Rochester" (186).¹⁰ Etherege also rails against the sort of forces that, to his mind, needlessly broke up the circle. He is incredulous that, "Sir Charles Sedley sets up for good houres and Sobriety, [and that] my Lord [Dorset] has given over variety and shuts himself up within my Ladys arms" (167). To Middleton he writes disparagingly of the Earl of Mulgrave's marriage that, "Numps is now in the Stocks in earnest" (28). In even more high dudgeon he writes to Buckingham that:

I Received the News of your Grace's retiring into Yorkshire, and leading a sedate contemplative Life there, with no less Astonishment than I should hear of his Christian Majesty's turning Benedictine Monk, or the Pope's wearing a long Perriwig, and setting up for a flaming Beau in the seventy-fourth Year of his Age. (66)

Although this particular letter is a *tour de force* of comic raillery, there is little doubt that Etherege was genuinely disappointed when he wrote that a man described by Wilson as "the last splendid playboy of the fading Renaissance" (1948, 5), who had "regaled himself in the most exquisite Wines of Italy, Greece, and Spain, would, in the last Scene of his Life, debauch his Constitution in execrable Yorkshire Ale" (67).

The courtly enclave is filled in by reference to a host of other London figures and places. To Middleton Etherege complains that, "They talk of great doeings at Munick, but Mistress Meggs Maskarade, I feare, is beyond what is expected here by ... Geo: Etherege" (25). Mary Meggs had been an orange seller at the Covent Garden Theatre in the 1660s, and thus mention of her name carried with it a rich store of

associations. To Sunderland Etherege compares a woman he has met as follows: "She is very like and full as handsome as Mrs. Betty Mackerell, but more affected than Mrs. Middleton" (60). And Bracher points out that "Betty Mackarel, [was] an orange girl at the Theatre Royal famous for her ... promiscuity [and] Jane Middleton ... [was to be seen] at the gambling tables of the Duchess Mazarin in Chelsea" (1974, 61). Many other of the letters include references to actresses in the Duke's Company such as "Mrs. Wright or Mrs. Johnson" (72) and "Mrs. Barry" (186); and in the King's Company, such as "Sarah Cooke" (185) and "Mrs. Percivall" (186). Places mentioned include, in a letter to the Earl of Carlingford, "the poore dog and Partridge" (176). Bracher notes that this "was a tavern on Fleet Street frequented by Etherege's friends" (1974, 177). Reference to the same establishment occurs in three separate letters to William Jephson, in the first of which Etherege assures him that "all the remains of the Dog and partridge will be remember'd" (186). Again, Etherege asks that William Richards "Remember me to all my friends at the Rose, and do not forget the lilly at the Bar" (179), the Rose being a "tavern on Russell Street, Covent Garden ... [which] had been a meeting place for the Wits" (Bracher 1974, 179). Taken together, the frequency of these references constitute an attempt to recreate in epistolary space what Peter Borsay describes as the "transformation" that had taken place after the Restoration "in the sphere of fashionable leisure" (1997, 187). Developments in this transformation were specifically "pioneered" by the "capital and its West End ... with a re-invigorated Restoration theatre ... proliferating walks, pleasure gardens, coffee-houses, taverns, clubs and societies" (187).

At times the letters seem very specifically to have the power not just to facilitate the remembrance of things past, to provide Etherege with a "nostalgic picture of his past" (Bracher 1974, xi), but even to allow their momentary recreation (by a man who would never again return to London). To Middleton Etherege writes: "Pray, my Lord, continue me in your favour, and when you are in any of those Leisur-places where Idle Fellows are admitted, let me intrude sometimes into your memory" (27). The thought of such an intrusion seems to allow Etherege some kind of access by proxy to the cultural spaces of London. To Robert Corbet he writes that, "There is not a day but my thoughts dog you from the Coffee-house to the Play, from

thence to Marribone, allways concern'd for your good luck" (113);¹¹ and to William Jephson, as if the reading of a letter were capable of actual bodily transportation: "How pleasanter it is to jolt about in poor hackney Coaches to find out the harmless lust of the Town than to spend the time in a Roome of State ... A letter from you so fires me with the thought of the life I have lead that I can hardly forbear railing at that I am condemn'd to" (185). Janet Gurkin Altman notes that, "Letter-writers are conscious of sharing neither space nor time ... with their correspondents, yet they try to approximate a conversation in the here and the now" (1977, 309). But from the preceding three examples that I have given from Etherege's letters it is clear that any "sharing" takes place not in "the here and the now", for absence is never forgotten, but in the special forum of the epistolary space provided by the writing and the receiving of letters. A kind of compensatory and elegiac reverie takes place that depends precisely upon the nostalgia induced by the knowledge of distance in space and in time from the object or place of desire. Presence in this space is of course different to presence in person but sometimes, just sometimes, it is almost equally rewarding. So, to Robert Corbet, Etherege laments that he will not be with him in the fashionable resort of Tunbridge Wells this year; and so asks that Corbet "let my friends know I wou'd willingly loos a hundred or two Hundred pounds to enjoy them there this Season, but since I cannot immediately have that happyness, be so kind to lett me have it at second hand. You are able to make the relation of what has pass'd there almost as pleasant to me as if I had been a partaker" (133).

Etherege maintained control over his recreations in epistolary space through constant demands of his correspondents to "lett me know what is doeing in England" (12),¹² although the difficulties of staying in touch were also acknowledged: "I dare not mention any thing of London to you. The aire of the Towne may be so alter'd that I shall be thought to talk like an Indian" (129). Despite this last reservation Etherege's construction of a courtly enclave in epistolary space seems to link up with Cynthia Wall's locating in the Restoration of "a perception of urban space that itself is changed, become abstract, modern, as much a product of social and economic practices and fluctuations as of physical structures and relations" (1998, x). Wall draws a sharp distinction between:

pre-Fire works that also centre on London (the Jacobean city plays, the London tavern songs, the occasional poems, the cony-catching manuals) ... [and] the post-Fire London literature as more specific, more concentrated, and more jointly involved not in negotiating within *given* space but in discovering and defining what had become a sort of *terra incognita*: some things could no longer be taken for granted; they needed to be *asserted*. (xii)

Although Wall specifically links this change to the consequences of the Fire (as a particular strategy of recovery) there is no reason at all to believe that Etherege's writings were affected by that calamity.¹³ Rather, I connect the letters to that process whereby for instance, "St. James's [Park] was enlarged and redesigned on French models by Charles II. In 1660 he basically created the site of Restoration drama ... he built a tree-lined avenue ... he combined small ponds to make a canal ... and stocked deer" (162). In turn Etherege imagines his dull business in Ratisbon in terms of that site; as for example in a letter to Henry Guy: "The business of the Diet for the most part is onely fit to entertain those insects in politiques which crawl under the trees in St. James's Park" (120). By such means Etherege recreates the kind of London in epistolary space that Charles II had recreated in social space on his restoration to the throne; as he set about consciously remoulding Puritan London in the image of his memories of pre-Civil War London, coloured by his experiences of France. Thereby both were "articulating what Henri Lefebvre calls 'the production of space', the modern sense of space as abstract, shifting, culturally rather than simply physically produced" (Wall 1998, xi).

Etherege's attempt to recreate some form of high Restoration culture in epistolary space cannot be regarded as a neutral act; merely a continual "harking back to the great days of [his] career in the theater" (Bracher 1974, xi). MacLean notes that during the 1660s "Literary production was a major cultural ingredient of the king's return"; with writers seeking "to achieve a nostalgic cancellation of the past two decades by describing the kind of celebratory festivity and conspicuous consumption to be enjoyed by loyal Englishmen now that monarchy had been restored" (1995, 14 and 15).¹⁴ An attempt was made "to foreclose on the revolutionary decades by linking the Restoration present directly to the pre-revolutionary past" (MacLean 1995, 17); as John Montaña notes, "by drawing on the

very real consensus about the evils of the Commonwealth ... and the recollection of the Protectorate” (1995, 47).¹⁵ Such activity was necessary as a result of the “vulnerable, fragile character of a society which remembered one Civil War and feared another” (Glassey 1997, 9). Miller draws attention to just how acute this vulnerability was with reference to the fact that the “early 1660s saw Venner’s rising, the Derwentdale plot and many rumours of ‘fanatic’ plots and plans for republican risings” (1979, 34); and Blair Worden that “There were those, Algernon Sidney among them, who argued for armed resistance” and to the existence of a very well organised “Dissenting network” (1995, 130 and 119) quite prepared to hide in London and support such committed Commonwealthsmen as Milton, Ludlow, Sidney, and Vane. Clearly some form of response was necessary to the continued activities of republican propagandists and to counteract the circulation of “the ‘continued prodigies’ that the saints were so eager to detect in the 1660s and to interpret as evidence of divine wrath upon their enemies” (Worden 1995, 125-6).

Etherege was at the forefront of such activities in the service of the monarchy during the whole of the reign of Charles I. Montañó notes that the “reopening of the theaters and the outburst of panegyric poetry began the celebration of the king’s return and were central to the creation of the images of monarchy” (1995, 35); and Etherege’s *The Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub*, premiering “in April or in March 1664”, according to a contemporary commentator achieved “more Reputation and Profit than any preceding Comedy” (quoted in Corder 1982, 3). Pepys’s comments on the first performance of *She Would if She Could* on 6th February 1668 illustrate just how central a new play by Etherege was to the culture of the Restoration:

My wife being gone before, I to the Duke of York’s playhouse ... and though I was there by two o’clock, there was 1000 people put back that could not have room in the pit ... Lord! how full was the house ... The King was there ... And among the rest here was the Duke of Buckingham ... with my Lord Buckhurst, and Sedley, and Etheridge the poet ... (quoted in Sim 1997, 656)

That Pepys found the play “silly” and yet sat through it, even though he had previously found *The Comical Revenge* also “a silly play” (458) is a mark of just how integral such cultural production was and of just how irresistible were certain plays.

Set before the Restoration, *The Comical Revenge* includes the cowardly character of Sir Nicholas Cully “one whom Oliver, for the transcendent knavery and disloyalty of his father, has dishonoured with knighthood” (I. ii. 178-80).¹⁶ In contrast is the dissipated yet honourable and loyal Sir Frederick Frollick; recreated much later in *The Man of Mode* as Sir Fopling Flutter. However ridiculous the latter two characters may appear there is no question but that they are there by right in their connection to the pre-Civil War period; and not to be subject to the “many complaints about the court’s corruption and rapacity” (Miller 1985, 34) voiced during the Restoration. *The Comical Revenge* is a play set on three levels and Harold Brown notes that Frollick “is too promiscuous and too careless of dignity to exist in the heroic plot, but he still seems a gentleman, intelligent and urbane” (1975, 683). Etherege’s next two plays drop the heroic plot entirely and urbanity becomes the keynote, as exemplified in the guises of such characters as Mr Courtall, Mr Freeman, and Mr Dorimant. Moreover, the activities of Wheadle and Palmer in the tavern scenes of *The Comical Revenge* were replicated by Etherege in his verse correspondence with Lord Buckhurst. For example in ‘Mr Etherege’s Answer’ the narrator describes a whole day spent asleep:

But the next morning fresh and gay
 As citizen on holiday,
 I wandered in the spacious Town
 Amongst the bawds of best renown,
 / .../
 To Temple I a visit made—
 / ... /
 She made me friends with Mrs. Cuffley,
 Whom we indeed had used too roughly;
 For by a gentler way I found
 The nymph would fuck under ten pound.
 (quoted in Thorpe 1963, 39)

James Thorpe believes that the verse epistles “were, in all probability, actually written by Lord Buckhurst ... and Etherege. Thus they are among the few extant examples of true familiar verse epistles which joined absent friends by an exchange of ordinary discourse or tavern talk” (1963, 109). If the friends were indeed “absent” from each other at the time of writing then the epistles must have been posted and Etherege must have been operating in epistolary space as early as the mid-1660s. As Jeremy Treglown points out, “the correspondence of the ‘Court Wits’ ... was quickly treated as public property” (1980, 1); thus the circulation of copies of Buckhurst’s and Etherege’s scandalous missives would have acted as another means of connection with the culture of the reign of Charles I.

The “poses and manners” (Thorpe 1980, 109) that were struck in epistolary space were very similar to those struck in real life. For Etherege was invariably involved in the host of scandalous and notorious public incidents which punctuated the Restoration period. Michael Cordner records that he was involved in “an abortive duel in Covent Garden and a tavern quarrel during which a man who attempted to part Etherege from his opponent ‘was runn with a sword under the eye’. Above all, in 1676 ... Etherege was present at Epsom in the nocturnal skirmish with the watch which ended tragically in the death of Captain Downs” (1982, x-xi). Such incidents were invariably reported in letters of the time.¹⁷ The underlying ethos in all these events seems to be that the privileged may do as they please regardless of the opprobrium of the general populace. Dale Underwood notes that, “The historical explanation for what is commonly called the cynicism and immorality of Restoration comedy has traditionally been that of Macaulay—a reaction to the moral repressions of the Interregnum, a swing of the pendulum, a letting off of steam” (1957, 7). The explanation is certainly more complex than that. For as Rachel Weil notes, “Charles II was presented as having rescued England from a decade of repression; in effect, as having stolen Christmas back from the Grinch. The new regime associated itself in its own propaganda with fruitfulness, bounty and sensual pleasure” (1993, 137). In other words the public behaviour of Etherege, amongst many others, was an indirect means of cementing and enforcing the natural right of the restored monarchy to rule more or less absolutely.

In his letters from Ratisbon to London Etherege repeatedly tries to recreate the kind of cultural propagandizing that he had indulged in on behalf of Charles II; this time in the service of James II. This then is the source in Etherege's letters of the "nonclosural dynamics" and metonymic "forces that engender and maintain a narrative and that may or may not lead to a stable closure" (MacArthur 1990, 271 and 3). Even in the letters to the forty eight addressees that have survived it is clear that Etherege had built up a large network in epistolary space; quite enough potentially to rival the "fourteen who at one time or another were members of the charmed inner circle" (1948, 7) of court wits as defined by Wilson. Etherege's letters are littered with talk of the Restoration theatre. To Middleton Etherege refers to Will Herbert, passing through Ratisbon on his way to fight in Hungary, as follows: "This Cutting Morecraft promises to make as good an Officer as Falstaff" (31); thereby referring to the work of Beaumont and Fletcher and Shakespeare in one sentence. Again, to Henry Guy he writes "that ceremony is as unsufferable to me as noise was to Morose" (106-7), referring to a character in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*; and in another letter that he and Guy should maintain by good humour the sympathy of the young, "that we may help them rail at the morose and cry out with fallstaff, 'Down with them; they hate us Youth'" (157).¹⁸ To demand such theatrical literacy from his correspondents was another way of insisting upon and upholding the values of the disintegrating Restoration regime. As is Etherege's recalling on 4th August 1687 of his infamous verse correspondence of the 1660s with Lord Buckhurst, in a letter addressed to the same man (now known as the Earl of Dorset):

Yet you and I were n'ere so bold to turn the faire Cuffle, when she fled us,
into a tree, not dreaming she wou'd grow as big as one of Evelin's Oaks, nor
our selves into Bulls when we carried the two dragle'd tayl'd Nymphs one
bitter frosty night over the Thames to Lambeth. (135)

This richly allusive recollection of an escapade with a well-known prostitute is at once a lament for the past and an attempt to rekindle in the letter reader the spirit of that past. Again, Etherege occasionally replicates the explicit tavern language of his earlier verse epistles; as when he tells William Jephson on 8th March 1688 that "this is a Countrey [where] ... few foul their fingers with touching of a Cunt that dos not

belong to a Countess" (186). When he does his recollection of the reckless and profane talk of the reign of Charles II functions in the same manner as the raising of a standard. Once more, Etherege's interest throughout his time in Ratisbon in procuring and discussing John Dryden's royalist poem *The Hind and the Panther*, published in 1687, evidences his belief in the power of cultural productions to affect the cause of the King.¹⁹

It was this invincible belief which appears to have ensured that Etherege either did not or could not accept that James II's cause was lost. For this reason his letters fail to resemble those of a sober diplomat right until the end. For example, he insistently treats the Imperial Diet, and the "Persons of Beard and Gravity" (92) who sit in it (which he was in Ratisbon to observe), with what Brown refers to as "comic shallowness": "the heightened value of wit instead of human emotion or moral character in judgement of proper social conduct" (1975, *passim* and 675). So, to Middleton Etherege remarks that the Diet "meet every day and Complement one another till it be time to eate their Sauer Craut" (25); that "the Diet have done nothing since my last but sung te deum and eate and drunk their acknowledgements for the taking of Buda" (59); and in disparagement that the Diet is no more than a "Senate of Cheesemongers" (247). Often Etherege focuses the power of his wit on a particular person, usually the Emperor's co-commissioner the Count of Windischgrätz—as for instance to Sunderland: "He has been formerly employd in the French Court and has twenty times told me how he was received there, with as much heat as an old Lady tells some pleasant passage of her Youth which warms her" (60). Although Bracher notes that by 1685 the Diet had "lost much of its importance" he is in no doubt that much of Etherege's disparagement is "exaggerated" (1974, xxi). Middleton too seems to have realised that he was not receiving entirely accurate reports about what was going on in the Diet and appears at some point to have requested that Etherege change his style of letter writing. For in a letter of 23rd December 1686 Etherege meekly acknowledges "the directions from Mr. Wynne of the method you wou'd have me use in writing, which I shall carefully observe, since it will be for your ease" (75-6). And yet Etherege has his own agenda to follow in despite of that of his master; and as Bracher notes "subsequent letters show no trace of a new method"

(1974, 76). Etherege seems determined at all costs to seek out the ridiculous in Germany in his letters. On the taking of a town by a contingent of Bavarian soldiers Etherege reports that “notwithstanding Pest was disserted, [they] did not possess themselves of it without some Loss” (43-44). He then proceeds to narrate a series of comical blunders that led to three men being killed or wounded by a lone wolf, including a General who lost a “great peece of his Jack-boote” (44); before the animal was finally slain only by “a luckie shot” (44). Again, Etherege reports in a deadpan manner various incompetent attempts to take the city of Buda, in one of which the Duke of Lorraine:

sprang two Mines under the breach on the Southwest part of the Town, which had a contrarie effect and kill'd about 20 of their own men. On the 14/24 in the morning he sprung an other with worse success, for it kill'd about 100 of their own, so that no good is expected from that way of working. (49)

Only for very brief moments does Etherege condescend to talk seriously; and when he does so he very quickly reverts to his favoured character of Falstaff: “Pardon me this fit of gravity. I find it begins to wear off already” (206).

The displays of wit and celebrations of Restoration culture that are to be found in Etherege’s letters are mirrored in the festival that he organised in Ratisbon to celebrate the birth of the son of James II (later to become the Old Pretender) on 10th June 1688; what Bracher refers to as “the high point of Etherege’s diplomatic career ... also Sir George’s last dramatic triumph” (1969, 53). That such a festival was sorely needed is evidenced by Ivan Roots’s reference to the “hugger-mugger circumstances of the birth of the Prince of Wales ... and the more or less coincident acquittal of the seven bishops” (1992, 47). Such disasters were very soon to lead directly to James’s two successive attempts to escape from the incoming forces of William of Orange by abandoning his own throne. So, on 29th July 1688 Etherege writes to Middleton with a description of “a publique rejoycing for the happy birth of the Prince” as follows:

On Sunday after the *te deum* I treated the Diet and the forraigne Ministers here. On Monday I gave a Ball to the Ladys and Cavaliers of the place and

neighbourhood round about. On Tuesday I entertain'd all the Principal Magistrats of the Towne [and] ... the great concourse of people of all Sorts, some to be Spectators, the mobile to scramble for an Ox which was rosted whole, for bread and mony which was throwne among them, and wine which run out of artificial Fountains ... All past without any other mischiffe then fingers cut, many broken heads, not a few bloody noses, and an universall bloody Drunkenes. (214)

That such a display was not unique is evidenced by Etherege's own reporting on 10th March 1687 of the activities of a fellow diplomat: "Some ministers here who are of the Reform'd Religion report that my Lord Castlemain, at the magnificent Treat he gave to the Prelates at Rome, drew a Curtain behind which was his Majestie's Picture with John Calvin under his feet" (98). Such provocative and gaudy displays were clearly intended to be the subject of hearsay and debate across the whole of Europe. In the long run however all such displays in Ratisbon and Rome and in letters would prove to be in vain.

The collapse of Etherege's courtly enclave

Lionel Glassey notes that "James [III]'s deposition was an unexpected development which few anticipated and which James himself only made possible by his escape to France" (1997, 9); and Jones that, "James's policies were realistic. They failed, but it needed William's invasion to wreck them, and Englishmen were generally alarmed enough to believe that only such an invasion could ensure their failure" (1972, 17). Etherege himself was in a better position than most to anticipate the fomenting of William of Orange's plans in respect of his father-in-law, "This place being the Center of Europe" (212). And as Bracher notes, the "growing threat of a move against James II by William of Orange and his Whig supporters in England obsessed Etherege from midsummer of 1688 to the actual invasion in November" (1974, xxii). However, the course of this obsession was punctuated by wild fluctuations. In a letter of 4th October 1688 Etherege reports a conversation in which it was said that "nothing cou'd make the designe fail against England" (240); in a letter of 11th October he is "apologizing if his reports on the invasion seem exaggerated" (240); and on 28th October that "'Tis near 3 moneths since I have been perswaded of this

design and have cry'd out sufficiently. I wish you had taken the allarm as soon in England" (244). In fact there were several reasons why Etherege's alarms were not taken sooner by James.

In the first place, "Ever since his accession James had based his attitude on the belief that European affairs were of only marginal importance to him" (Jones 1972, 177). As a result of this attitude "In practice, Britain's diplomatic corps compared unfavourably with those of her European rivals, especially France" (Davies 1997, 217); a situation which can be traced back to the reign of Charles II, who had never had "an adequate diplomatic corps" and so was unable "to take on a serious European rôle" (Holmes 1993, 97).²⁰ Indeed Jones concludes that in "1688 for all practical purposes James might as well have had no diplomatic service and no foreign policy" (1972, 184). This seems a trifle hard on Etherege, who despite his unconventional approach was probably not a bad diplomat by the standards of his day and who even declared to Sunderland on 19th May 1687 that he had developed "such a relish of business that I shou'd be more vain of making a good dispatch than of writing a witty letter" (116). But as Bracher notes, "Apparently the post at Ratisbon was regarded in London as a sinecure, a means of taking care of an old friend who had fallen on evil days"; and in any case the "incumbent of the post at Ratisbon had the lowest rank in the diplomatic corps—'resident,' without 'character,' as distinguished from the 'envoys' at The Hague, Vienna, Copenhagen, or Paris" (1969, 46 and 47). The most that would have been hoped of Etherege would be that he "might report something that would corroborate what had already been received from more active centers like Paris or The Hague" (47). Secondly, at the very least the competence of the two secretaries of state (Middleton and Sunderland) to whom Etherege was writing has been called into question. Holmes notes that Middleton, Etherege's principal correspondent, was "embarrassingly anonymous" (1993, 95). More seriously—and despite the fact that during his secretaryship he was largely "dominant" (Tomlinson 1979, 111)—Jones notes that in retrospect "James and Jacobite propagandists explained away his strange behaviour and inertia in 1688 by putting the blame on deliberate treachery by Sunderland" (1972, 176). In any case,

Holmes makes it quite clear that secretarial authority was constantly undermined by the preference of both Charles and James for "closet diplomacy" (1993, 95).

Lastly and perhaps most importantly Etherege himself had absolutely lost control of epistolary space by the time of the Revolution: his attempt to carve out a courtly enclave in order to serve the interests of James II being constantly undermined and second guessed by parties present in Ratisbon at the behest of William of Orange. Cordner notes that it was only "Late in his time at Ratisbon, [that] Etherege realized the harm being done him by the stories which were now crossing Europe about him, and he began to take his duties more seriously" (1982, xi). But in fact Etherege knew full well from very early on in his residency that not all those in Ratisbon were favourable to him. In particular he singled out as his enemy Pierre Valkenier, resident at Ratisbon from the States General and "a fervent supporter of the Prince of Orange" (Bracher 1974, 44). It was Valkenier that Etherege blamed (in a letter of 13th February 1687 to Captain Solomon Slater) for the spreading of "idle Reports" (90) which soured his relations with Bevil Skelton, the English Ambassador at Paris: "This is not the first trick has been playd me since my being here, and is not the last" (89). To Robert Corbet on March 13th 1687 Etherege complained of the circulation of "an idle report, as I am inform'd from London" (101) of excessive losses at gambling; on the contrary, "I have not playd at any thing but 6 penny ombre these 13 months" (101). And again to Owen Wynne on 8th May 1687 he draws attention to the possibility that "some of the Spightfull people of this place have written some thing to doe me ill offices" (114). Clearly it was not Etherege alone who was attempting to exploit epistolary space; also clear is that those others were using far more direct means than Etherege's effete construction of a courtly enclave in epistolary space: namely rumour-mongering and tricks. What Etherege never realised was the organisation and determination of the forces ranged against him: Bracher puts this into perspective when he notes that: "It looks very much as though Etherege had been the unwitting victim of a plot among Hughes, Harbord, and Valkenier. All three of these men continued to work for, and were ultimately rewarded by, William of Orange" (1967, 340). Hugo Hughes was Etherege's own personal secretary in Ratisbon, "a violently anti-Catholic, puritanical,

middle-class civil servant"; a man who copied out each of the letters sent by Etherege "to enable Pierre Valkenier ... to read Sir George's official dispatches at a time when many Englishmen ... were plotting to put William of Orange on the throne of England" (Bracher 1967, 332). Bracher points out that Valkenier was even so unwise as accidentally to betray the fact that he was in possession of such intelligence to Etherege; who at once noticed the error but mistook the source and blamed Middleton's secretary Owen Wynne: "it looks a little strange ... that the Hollanders shou'd have intelligence in our Secretary of State's office ... I write this to you that you may take care whom you trust your letters to" (223). With Hughes unsuspected, Etherege was powerless to prevent his loss of control of epistolary space; for Hughes seized and exploited under his employer's nose the very means of production, the two letterbooks now sitting in the library at Harvard, of the courtly enclave that Etherege hoped would serve James II.

Nor did Etherege's enemies stop at this level of proaction in the pursuit of their cause; Hughes in particular was not content merely to let Etherege's letters speak for themselves. In fact he made his own competing forays into epistolary space in 'An account of Sir G's life and manner of Living, writt in Severall Letters from Ratisbonne' which Bracher includes as the fifth appendix to his edition of Etherege's letters. This account represents a sustained attempt to assassinate the character of Hughes's employer; it is addressed to an 'Honoured Sir' in England whom Bracher identifies as most probably William Harbord, "A fanatical supporter of the Protestant interest" (1967, 334). The 'account' begins with the progress of Etherege on his way to Ratisbon in 1685; and of his "loosing 250 £ by play, his haunting pittifull and mean houses [and] ... his caressing every dirty Drab that came in his way from Holland to this place" (292). Once in Ratisbon, the habit of Etherege and a series of new friends "was to drink till 2 or 3 a clock in the morning ... one night they wou'd make themselves so drunk that endeavouring to go home they shou'd be found next morning to lie sleeping in the Streets, an other night they wou'd break windows, and a third attack indifferently all such persons ... as had the misfortune to come in their way" (294). Amidst a host of tales in the 'account' several stand out:

What they did upon St. Louis's day was more famous than all the rest; for Sir G. not thinking it enough to have had two sisters in his chamber that night, where they all danced Stark naked, went afterwards about the streets with Le Febure, having nothing on but their shirts. (296)

Also noteworthy is Etherege's affair with a "Commedian" from Nuremberg with the character "of an errant whore" (299). His affection for this woman led to various indignities including an arranged and violent siege of his house and a general opprobrium of his conduct:

but he was so far from being concern'd at what any one said that sometimes after the play has ended, he has putt her into his coach before all the Company notwithstanding all the giggling and hissing of the Austrian Ladys and of the Ministers wives and Daughters, himself humbly walking home on foot. (300)

The scandal eventually became so great that the "Commedian" was forced out of the town by the magistrates. Bracher notes that Hughes "writing with deliberate malice, was not above stretching the truth in describing the slights and insults received and repaid by Etherege" (1974, xx). But in his biography Huseboe concludes that: "Very simply, Etherege ... tried to live in the staid capital of Ratisbon in the same way he had lived in lively London" (1987, 47). And indeed Hughes's account of Etherege's friendships with a series of ne'er do wells passing through Ratisbon chimes only too well with various earlier accounts of his tempestuous relations and botched duels with tavern friends in London: "One while they shou'd seem as fond as children of each other, and an other time they wou'd be at Daggers-drawing, calling names and challenging" (294). My argument throughout this chapter has been that Etherege deliberately fostered imaginations of himself and his behaviour in epistolary space that recalled the "exhibitionist lack of moral restraint, hectic pursuit of selfish pleasure and arrogant lack of consideration for others" (Jones 1979, 27) characteristic of the adherents of the court of Charles II. Why then should Hughes's baleful exaggeration of his employer's "life and manner of Living" in Ratisbon have been so harmful?

The answer to this question is that if the epistolary space of Etherege's letters can be compared to that of the social spaces of London's parks during the Restoration

period, as I have done earlier in this chapter, then so too can its fate. For, “after Charles II’s death in 1685, the public parks in general slipped into what some perceived as a steady social decline. St. James’s was no longer the sole province of sovereign and court, and by Queen Anne’s time it would become a notorious site for prostitutes and Mohocks” (Wall 1998, 166). A similar process took place in Covent Garden whose houses had originally found “wealthy tenants”: after the fruit and vegetable market had become established by 1670 gradually most of the houses gave way “to more and more shops and coffee houses, gambling dens, brothels and bath houses” (159). The decline of the importance of the court during the period after the death of Charles II, and the correspondent rise of metropolitanism, will be charted in much greater detail in later chapters. In the meantime it is enough to note the Restoration government’s perception that coffee houses in particular “perpetuated the cultural divisions between cavalier and puritan”; and that they specifically “drew people away from alehouses and taverns” (Pincus 1995, 823). Such a cultural division was mirrored in epistolary space, with Etherege’s version corresponding to a lively tavern and Hughes’s to a seditious but sober coffee shop. In these terms Hughes’s version triumphed over the rapidly outdated version of Etherege. Pincus notes that “coffeehouses had become so popular because they specialized in the circulation of news” (1995, 818); and this is just how Hughes’s Whig version of epistolary space functioned as Etherege well knew (without realising Hughes’s particular involvement). To Captain Solomon Slater Etherege complains that “Valkeneer ... has supply’d our Gazeteers here with lys from his own Country” (89); to Owen Wynne of the “Swarms of Lyes which fly about the Empire to blacken his Majestie’s just and reasonable designs at home [which] come for the most part from that Hive where Ferguson by connivance and Burnet by allowance unload the poison they are swell’d with” (177); and of the effects of “sham news and sham letters” (189) out of Holland; and to the Earl of Carlingford in dismay at the publication in several languages of “the booke which has been so often mention’d in private letters” proclaiming that “the Prince of Wales is suppos’d” (235). Clearly the epistolary space of 1688 was awash with such stories—as if it were one vast coffee shop. Almost at the end of his tether, on 26th September 1688, Etherege finally seemed to

despair of ever being able “to contradict the many malicious lies which come hither with every Post from Holland” (237).

Holmes notes that “James fell victim to a combination of poor intelligence and totally unrealistic deductions about the reality of the threat from his Dutch son-in-law” (1993, 187). In contrast, William’s “intelligence was excellent” (186). Much of this intelligence came as a result of the fact that “republicans, radicals, and Whigs had their favourite coffeehouses” (Pincus 1995, 816) which served as exchanges of seditious ideas; and because William had used the visits of his diplomats to London to “establish and maintain a whole network of undercover contacts with friends and potential friends” (Holmes 1993, 180). This activity, as I have shown, was mirrored in epistolary space by the likes of Hugo Hughes (who was rewarded after Etherege had deserted his post with the position of resident at Ratisbon). In contrast, the court’s and Etherege’s association with and promotion of tavern culture—defined by “inebriated play” and “traditional English pastimes ... [and] sexual escapades” (Pincus 1995, 815 and 823)—proved ineffective. For once the usually astute Sunderland was wrong when he wrote to Bevil Skelton at Paris that: “Men are not to judge of Englishmen by their talk in coffee houses, nor by what idle, beggarly knaves that go into Holland say” (quoted by Holmes 1993, 177). Towards the end James II suddenly and dramatically lost faith in and dismissed Sunderland; signalling an abrupt and complete change of policy designed to quell the forces that were ranged against him. It is a mark of the extent of the collapse of Etherege’s courtly enclave in epistolary space, and of how close he was to forlorn and obscure exile in Paris with the Jacobites, that his letter to Sunderland of 15th November 1688 was written long after the secretary of state had been dismissed from office on the 26th October of that year. It thus missed its addressee and perhaps fell into the hands of James II’s new secretary of state, Viscount Preston. Although on 29th November 1688, as soon as he heard that Sunderland was “out of affaires” (254), Etherege wrote to pay his respects to Preston in the most obsequious terms, in fact by this time William of Orange and his army of mixed origin were already marching east from Exeter, the royal army was already beset by desertion and retreating from

Salisbury without engagement, and York had already been seized by Danby and an army of English rebels.

In the first scene of Etherege's last play, *The Man of Mode*, Dorimant ostentatiously announces:

What a dull insipid thing is a billet doux written in cold blood, after the heat of the business is over? It is a tax upon good nature which I have been labouring to pay, and have done it, but with as much regret, as ever fanatic paid the Royal Aid, or church duties; 'twill have the same fate I know that all my notes to her have had of late, 'twill not be thought kind enough. Faith women are i'the right when they jealously examine our letters, for in them we always first discover our decay of passion. (I. i. 3-13)

Similarly, a jealous examination of the unstable nature of the epistolary space of Etherege's letters, written from the thick of Imperial intrigue at the Diet in Ratisbon, provides ample evidence of the inherent instability and rapid decay of the Jacobite cause; even as that cause seemed perfectly stable back in an insular minded Britain. Etherege himself, however, only belatedly realised that his forays into epistolary space did not constitute effective service in the royalist cause; but instead provided only a final series of elegies of the Restoration, written by a man termed by John Harold Wilson "the pitiful last of the rakes" (1948, 200).

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¹ In contrast historians of the 1950s and 1960s largely ignored "the importance of chance and of accidents of personality" (Miller 1985, vii); and instead concentrated on the delineation of "economic and social developments as the motive forces of historical change" (Miller 1983, vi). As a result, the "post-Restoration period became unfashionable and, in the eyes of some, unimportant. The Revolution of 1688-9, once seen as the climactic event of the century, now appeared merely a confirmation of the great changes of 1640-60" (Miller 1983, vi).

² Arthur Huseboe notes that Etherege is "known as the author of more than four hundred letters, a far greater number than can be claimed for any other Restoration dramatist", and that as "a letter writer ... he was a skilled prose stylist and a keen observer" (1987, 104 and xii). Frederick Bracher would seem to concur with Huseboe's verdict on the letters when he notes that, "Dryden was being conventionally hyperbolic when he called Etherege 'the undoubted best author of [prose] which our nation has produced,' but the letters certainly prove Etherege to be a master of the informal style" (1974, xxi); as would Michael Cordner: "One other aspect of [Etherege's] output deserves noting here. A large number of his personal

and business letters survive ... They provide a great deal of material of interest for the interpretation of the plays" (1982, xii). As Bracher explains, there are three main sources for Etherege's letters. The first of these is "Two letterbooks now in the Houghton Library at Harvard ... the official record of Etherege's correspondence" (1974, xii-xiii). These letterbooks were compiled by Etherege's secretary Hugo Hughes; and taken by Etherege to Paris after he left Ratisbon. The second source is a "manuscript letterbook in the British Museum"; which, as Bracher argues, is a secret copy of the first of the Harvard letterbooks again compiled by Hughes and "not meant for Etherege's eyes" (xi and xiii). The third source is "two volumes of holograph letters [which] form part of the Middleton Papers in the British Museum" (xi).

³ Arthur Robinson and Helen Wallis go on to note that, "Road systems of Central Europe were mapped by Joh. Georg Jung and Georg Conrad Jung in 'Totius Germaniae Novum Itinerarium,' Nuremberg, 1641" (1987, 66). In the light of this and other dates of important maps it is clear that the mid-seventeenth century saw the first determined effort to map European roads; which in turn facilitated the better carriage of mails. It is my contention then that Etherege could not have written his kind of familiar letters much before the date of his residence in Ratisbon, for such informal, chatty letters require the support of a permanent and reliable postal service.

⁴ All quotations from Etherege's letters are taken from Bracher (1974); and followed by a page number in brackets. Bracher notes that except in a very few cases, "I preserve the original spelling, except that I have expanded abbreviations ..." (1974, xxiv). I have in all cases directly transcribed spelling from Bracher.

⁵ Although letters from Vienna to Ratisbon were frequently lost or excessively delayed: to Middleton Etherege complains that since "the begining of the Campagne our letters from Vienna find a Rub in their way" (44).

⁶ For instance as Secretary of State during the late 1650s Thurloe had ensured that the "residences of ambassadors were ... closely watched and their letters ... 'constantly opened'" (Marshall 1994, 26).

⁷ The only letter addressed to Lady Etherege that survives is deeply sarcastic. In it Etherege refers to a letter that he has received from her as follows: "I wish there were Copies of it in London. It might serve for a pattern for modest wives to write to their husbands" (100). That wounded sarcasm was the limit of the defiance that Etherege was prepared to fling in Lady Etherege's direction, however, is evidenced by his comment to John Cooke, about a joke he makes at her expense: "Pray be not so malicious to let the meaning of this come to my wife's ear" (163).

⁸ Corder notes that the first performance of this play was on 6 February 1668 (1982, 107). As a result of it, Etherege seems to have had a bad time at the hands of critics. For example, Sybil Rosenfeld draws attention to a contemporary lampoon: "Ovid to Pontus sent for too much Wit;/ Eth'rege to Turkey, for the want of it" (1928, 9).

⁹ Bracher points out that a "French gambler named Morin is said to have introduced basset into England about 1677. He dealt the game at the Duchess Mazarin's house, where Etherege customarily played" (1974, 207). Mazarin's house was located in "lodgings in Chelsea" (73); and in a letter to the Earl of Dover Etherege writes sadly that, "I am wean'd from the very thought of play, but my minde dayly travells to a place where there was a famous Basset in Morin's time. There I have envy'd a

Sitter-by more than the deepest player at the table ..." (207). See also Etherege's poem 'A Song on Basset': "There's nothing can engage the fair/ But money and Morin" (quoted in Thorpe 1963, 11).

¹⁰ Bracher notes that a "letter from John Verney ... names Jephson as one of the participants, along with Etherege and Rochester, in the notorious skirmishing of the watch at Epsom in June 1675" (1974, 122).

¹¹ Bracher notes that, "Judging from Etherege's letters, his good friend 'Mr. Corbet' was a gentleman-gambler, who operated in London and Tunbridge Wells" (1974, 58).

¹² Demands for specific information were targeted towards those in the best positions to provide it. For example Etherege asks Thomas Betterton, who had played Dorimant in the original production of *The Man of Mode*, for "now and then ... an account of the Stage and of other matters which (you shall judge) I will be glad to hear of" (119).

¹³ Indeed Cynthia Wall argues that Restoration "plays draw upon and reconfirm the structures and strategies of Jacobean city comedies in mapping predictable behaviours back into the undestroyed parts of London: St. James's Park, the Mall, Rosamund's Pond, Mulberry Gardens" (1998, 150). As far as I have seen there is no mention at all of the Fire in any of Etherege's extant letters.

¹⁴ How effective this activity was is revealed by Tom Paulin in a review of David Norbrook's *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics 1627-1660*; entitled 'Prophets of a lost paradise' and published in the weekend review section of the *Independent*, 30th January 1999. Paulin draws attention to this "burying of the past" indulged in by "Charles's minions"; and notes that, "Norbrook's study attempts to counter the effects of this erasure. Suppressing the republican element in English culture means that most British citizens have an impoverished idea of their national past."

¹⁵ Etherege himself, as his biographer points out, had ample reasons of his own for hating the Puritans. Huseboe draws attention to "the long series of events that had burdened young George's spirit from boyhood on: first the separation from his father in about 1642, then the climate of opinion in Maidenhead, where ... Puritanism was strong enough to make Captain Etherege's association with a Catholic Queen the source of considerable embarrassment. Then there had been the turbulent events of the Civil War, with Roundhead regiments mustering in Maidenhead Thicket, troops quartered everywhere in the village ..." (1987, 19).

¹⁶ All references to the plays are taken from Cordner (1982).

¹⁷ See for example John Muddyman's account of "the furious combat of Ashton and Etheridge" and Henry Savile's of "Buckly and Etheridge squabbling in a Taverne" (quoted in Treglown 1980, 70 and 173).

¹⁸ Amongst 'A Catalogue of Sir George's Bookes', included as appendix III in Bracher's edition of the letters, is "Shakespear's Plays" (286).

¹⁹ Etherege mentions Dryden's *The Hind and the Panther* in letters to Owen Wynne of 23rd June, 11th August, and 30th June 1687; to Henry Guy of 14th August 1687; and to the earl of Dorset of 4th August 1687. M. H. Abrams points out that in the poem "a milk-white Hind (the Roman church) and a spotted Panther (the Anglican church) eloquently debate theology. The Hind has the better of the argument, but Dryden

already knew that James's policies were failing, and with them the Catholic cause in England" (1993, 1787-8).

²⁰ When Charles II did condescend to interfere in Europe his "foreign policy was subject to wild oscillations" and characterised only by "instability" (Price, 1979, 121).

Chapter Three. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* and the Whig Schism under George I (1716-18)

*my mailbox ... my hiding place, the one spot in the world that was purely my own.
And yet it linked me to the rest of the world, and in its magic darkness there was the
power to make things happen.*

from Paul Auster's 'The Locked Room' (1987, 236)

Like Etherege, but in the interests of a very different cause, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu uses the imaginary epistolary space that is set up by the sending of the *Turkish Embassy Letters* in an attempt to make things happen. The addressees of the letters include such famous or powerful persons as Alexander Pope, Caroline, the Princess of Wales, Lady Mar, Lady Rich, and Lady Bristol. The letters were sent between August 1716 and November 1718, "compiled, and transcribed" (Halsband 1966b, 65) probably by the mid-1720s,¹ and eventually published to great European acclaim in 1763, a year after Montagu's death. These dates are significant for the mid-1710s and the early-1760s are usually taken to be the rough outer verges of a long period of stability in Britain: an age of oligarchy quite unlike the period during which Etherege wrote his letters.² During this 'age' "a relatively small number of Whig families ... [presided over an] oligarchic political structure"; and yet by the 1760s "some of its most essential constituents began to crumble" (Holmes 1993, 386). It is precisely the momentousness of these verges, especially the first, that demands the invocation of the 'magic darkness' of Montagu's mailbox: for both immediately before the first and immediately after the second there was no stability. This chapter demonstrates first of all that Montagu's politics aligned her with those Whig families in power; and second that the sending, compilation, and publication of the embassy letters can all be read as attempted interventions in the Whig cause.

The oligarchy was not easily achieved. Steven Zwicker notes that "literature created between the years of Republican ferment in the 1650s and the coalescence of a Georgian state in the early eighteenth century reflects the instability and partisanship of rebellious and factious times" (1998, xi); and J. V. Beckett that "the whole period 1694-1716 was characterized by a struggle between Whigs and Tories which was reflected throughout society" (1987, 2). The *Turkish Embassy Letters*,

however, are rarely acknowledged to have had any direct involvement in this cycle of savage party rivalry which ensured that “during the reigns of William and Mary, and Queen Anne, the people of England lived in suspense. Many feared—and the Jacobites hoped for—a new century scarred by revolution and war” (Murphy 1988, 8).³ This despite H. T. Dickinson’s conclusion that “the relationship between politics and literature has scarcely ever been closer than in the early eighteenth century” (1974, 1).⁴ In the latest edition of the embassy letters Anita Desai even speculates as to why Montagu in Turkey “took no apparent interest in the politics of the place or period but contented herself with visits to the zenana, the mosques and pleasure gardens, and in reporting on these scenes with all the absorption in minutiae of a water colourist” (1994, xxxi). Desai answers her own speculation with the surmise that Montagu perhaps “edited out of the letters all references to politics that might have been there originally” (xxxii). Such an argument is bolstered by Mary Favret’s argument that “between 1789 and 1830, the letter was used as a vehicle for political rather than sentimental expression ... the vehicle for a distinctly political, often disruptive force” (1993, i). For this implies that before 1789 the letter was not used as a vehicle for political expression. On the contrary this chapter, together with the last on Etherege, provides evidence for the argument that before the letter went through its sentimental expression it went through a political phase that was only recaptured in the period of Favret’s study.

In many ways the repeated failure to acknowledge the potential political impact of the embassy letters is surprising. After all, the strength of Montagu’s party allegiance has rarely been doubted. Robert Halsband notes that she always “remained firmly attached to the Whig principles she had learned from [her father] and his friends” (1956, 8); and Donna Landry that later on in life “Montagu supported Sir Robert Walpole” (1998, 307). She married a Whig politician, Edward Wortley Montagu, “becoming, as it were, his unofficial campaign manager” (Halsband 1956, 40). The political nature of her other writings has long been acknowledged. For example, Halsband remarks on *The Nonsense of Common Sense* that “its purpose was clearly to defend Walpole and his ministry from the attacks of the Opposition press (1977, 105).⁵ Again, the extent of Montagu’s hand in the

drafting of Joseph Addison's *Cato* (1714) is revealed in her 'Critique of *Cato*'. As Halsband explains, "The Whig party had been out of power for almost three years, and Addison's friends saw that his play could be rousing propaganda for their side, with the virtuous Cato as a Whig patriot opposing the tyrannical Tory rule" (1956, 32). There is evidence that Montagu, having been invited by Addison to comment on the play, increased its 'party' element; for in the 'Critique' she advises that "I would have some stronger Lines on Liberty scatter'd through the Play, and I beleive [*sic*] it would have a very good Effect on the Minds of the People" (1977, 67). Halsband decides that "Addison probably concurred, since lines on liberty are declaimed by Cato in every one of his scenes" (1977, 67). Perhaps as a result of the changes instigated by Montagu the play in production "aroused such vehement party enthusiasm that it was performed for 35 nights" (Magnusson 1990, 12).

There are at least two immediate historical reasons why the party political dimension of the *Turkish Embassy Letters* might so far have been downplayed and it is important that these reasons be considered here. First, there has been much recent debate as to the rigidity of the party divisions that existed in society during the period in which the letters were written and compiled—with prominent historians such as Linda Colley arguing that "political struggle took place within limits" as not very much more than "stylized ritual" (quoted in Beckett 1987, 4 and 8). For example Beckett asks: "if the divisions had been so acute and far reaching why had they not led to extra-parliamentary activity reminiscent of the 1640s and 1679-81, and why had political instability apparently produced no social equivalent?" (1987, 3). With the recent prevalence of this view it is unsurprising that the political nature of a work such as the embassy letters has been overlooked in favour of its many other aspects. But Beckett concludes that this interpretation is a result merely of a dearth of available evidence and that the earlier view of J. H. Plumb is much more likely to prove correct: "party division was real and it created instability" (2). Plumb argued that this division only providentially did not lead to a devastating re-run of the 1640s. To counter the arguments of historians such as Colley, Beckett notes that more work needs to be done "to examine the importance of party considerations away from the political hothouse of London" (4): for instance in local government and in the

boroughs. In fact, party considerations were even of importance in the vistas of epistolary space between Turkey and London.

Second, the party political nature of Montagu's embassy letters might have been underestimated as a result of Geoffrey Holmes's argument that "the Tory party committed suicide in 1714-16 leaving 'no hope of recovery'" (quoted in Beckett 1987, 11).⁶ As the first of the embassy letters is dated 3rd August 1716 this argument might seem to ensure that any decisive intervention in favour of the Whigs at this time, in epistolary space or elsewhere, would have been the equivalent of grooming an already immaculate horse. After all, following the death of Queen Anne (the last of the Stuart dynasty to rule) on 1st August 1714 the Tory administration rapidly disintegrated in the face of the Hanoverian Protestant succession; and the Whigs went on in January of 1715 to win "a sweeping victory in the Parliamentary elections" (Halsband 1956, 45). And yet the road to what Dickinson refers to as the long 'Whig supremacy' of the mid-eighteenth century was not as smooth as this brief narrative implies. For as Eveline Cruickshanks points out, "The Whigs ... soon began to quarrel among themselves and there was a split in the party. One section under the 3rd earl of Sunderland and Stanhope continued to look to George I, while another centred round the Prince of Wales" (1987, 36). In 1717, then, as a consequence of what came to be known as the 'Whig schism', Holmes notes (in a clear change of mind) that "further stimulated by a spectacular quarrel between the King and his son and heir, Prince George, who with Princess Caroline set up his own rival court at Leicester House ... [the Tories'] hopes of a *renversement* soared" (1993, 396).

The roots of the schism lay in George I's departure for Hanover in July 1716, accompanied by Secretary of State James Stanhope—only a week or two before Montagu left London for Europe to accompany her husband upon his embassy to Turkey. By September 1716 Holmes is already able to record "intrigues by Stanhope and Sunderland at Hanover against Townshend and Walpole" (1993, 208). In her attempt to determine some of the criteria which define the letter as a genre Patrizia Violi singles out "the referential mechanisms spatially and temporally anchoring the letter sentence to its situation of Utterance" (1985, 152). These referential

mechanisms at work in the *Turkish Embassy Letters* appear to follow the course of the conspiracy against Townshend and Walpole; and therefore ensure that those reading the letters at a later date are reminded of the destabilising schism. For by late November 1716 the Montagus too were in Hanover to enable Edward Wortley Montagu to deliver a letter personally to George I. Montagu herself sent two letters back to England from Hanover: one of which was dated 25th November and addressed to Lady Bristol and in which Montagu notes:

I can tell you without either flattery or partiality that our young Prince has all the Accomplishments that tis possible to have at his Age, with an Air of Sprightlynnesse and understanding, and something so very engaging and easy in his behaviour, that he needs not the advantage of his rank to appear charming. (286)⁷

At the time of the writing of this letter the inclusion of such a description of Frederick Louis, the eldest son of the Prince of Wales, would have appeared dangerously partisan. It appears even more so in the light of the hindsight provided to us by the eventual publication of Montagu's 'Account of the Court of George I', which contains a startlingly different picture of Frederick's father, the future King George II:

I have not yet given the Character of the Prince. The fire of his temper appear'd in every look and Gesture, which being unhappily under the Direction of a small understanding was every day throwing him upon some Indiscretion ... he look'd on all the Men and Women he saw as Creatures he might kick or kiss for his diversion, and whenever he met with any Oposition in those designs he thought his Opposers impudent Rebels to the Will of God who created them for his use ... (1977, 93)

According to this description the Prince of Wales very much needed the advantage of his rank to appear charming. Of course fathers and sons may be radically different, but it is significant that the 'Account'—most likely written "in the spring of 1715" (Halsband 1977, 82)—was intended, as Montagu puts it, "only for my selfe" (1977, 89). In contrast, Halsband concludes of the embassy letters that "it is certain that she intended them to be published" (1965, xvii). In other words Montagu includes a

lavish description of the promising Frederick in writing that she intends at some point to publish, and her true feelings about the Prince of Wales in writing that she has no intention of publishing. This intended suppression can be contrasted with her description in the 'Account' of George I as "an Honest Blockhead" (1977, 86): which chimes with her very neutral account of the king's "affability" (287) in the letter sent to Lady Bristol from Hanover. When set against Frederick's brilliance this affability looks very pale indeed. That Montagu, despite her dislike, is prepared to make the Prince of Wales look good through praise of his son is evidence of extreme partisanship in favour of the cluster of politicians, led by Sir Robert Walpole, who rushed to make their court at Leicester House as soon as the schism was effected.

Holmes identifies April 1717 as the "climax of the Whig Schism ... Townshend is dismissed and Walpole resigns" (1993, 208). At this point, as W. A. Speck notes, the Whig ministry was "torn asunder" as a result of "the relations of George I and his son, the controversy over foreign policy, and the influence of the Germans in George's court" (1977, 171 and 172). April 1717 also marks the climax, or crescendo, in terms of Violi's theoretical "space-time deixis" (1985, 149) of Montagu's letters: she is at her furthest distance from London (in Adrianople) and on a single day, the 1st, writes nine letters.⁸ In addition the onslaught of these letters is dated, as if in calculated sympathy, only a day after Benjamin Hoadly, the Whig bishop of Bangor, had precipitated the 'Bangorian controversy' by preaching an extreme Erastian sermon before George I; a controversy which Nicholas Phillipson refers to, along with the Sacheverell Crisis of 1709, as one of "those two classic trials of strength between junto Whiggery and its Tory opponents" (1993, 213). As a direct result of the schism and attendant controversies Tory forces began to align which "would have reversed the trend toward an all Whig ministry which had set in since Anne's death", allowing in a:

type [which] had been elbowed out of politics between the accession of George and the collapse of the Jacobite rebellion, largely because of the uncompromising stance of Townshend and Walpole. Moreover Harcourt, with whom Brydges [James, earl of Carnarvon] was clearly dealing, had not yet deviated from the most unbending Toryism and was playing a leading part

in the defence of Robert Harley, earl of Oxford, who was in the Tower facing impeachment charges. (Speck 1977, 176)

In the face of the threat posed by the schism it became all the more important for Whig factions at this point to identify “the genuine custodians of the Ark of the Party Covenant” (Holmes 1993, 348). The necessity of this identification did not disappear immediately; nor even as soon as the opportune deaths of both Sunderland and Stanhope had paved the way for Walpole’s second heady rise. For although Walpole quickly re-established himself after the bursting of the South Sea Bubble, this time as undisputed premier, Holmes notes that the institution of his Whig oligarchy was only “by 1727 ... showing signs of solidity”; although “By 1730 stability was no longer a pipe dream but a prosaic reality” (1993, 386). Even when the oligarchy was solidified it did not, as I show in later sections of this chapter, go unopposed. In other words throughout the time in which the *Turkish Embassy Letters* were being compiled the need for a statement of Whig principles was ever present: for this was a period which “found the Whig majority less monolithic than that party’s support had been from 1701-15” (Holmes 1993, 348) during ‘the rage of party.’ Crucially, this was a need which had first arisen during the period of the writing of the ‘actual letters’ from which Halsband (1965) demonstrates that the embassy letters derive. Just how the letters met this need is detailed in the third section of this chapter.

First it is necessary to ask why, if her devotion to the Whig cause was so strong, Montagu did not enter the fray and—sometime before the mid-to late 1720s—publish the embassy letters? The first answer to this question is that Montagu did just that, in the sense that she sent letters into epistolary space, to a variety of correspondents, during the most calamitous period of the Whig schism and thereby carved out a Whig enclave just as Etherege had carved out a courtly enclave in the later 1680s. The compiled embassy letters, then, are merely a distillation of what was sent in the heat of battle between 1716 and 1718. The second answer is connected with Montagu’s well-known compunction as an aristocratic woman to publish anything whatsoever that would infallibly identify her as the author; for unlike her other pseudonymous early publications—such as her essay in the *Spectator*, 28th July 1714, and ‘A Plain Account of the Inoculating of the Small Pox

by a Turkey Merchant’—publication of the embassy letters would certainly have identified her authorship. Cynthia Lowenthal draws attention to:

one of the central conflicts of an aristocratic woman’s letter writing: she must find a way to exploit a supposedly “private” epistolary discourse so that it does not violate her class and gender imperatives while it simultaneously creates a stature for her within the “public” realm. (1994, 2)

Halsband details how the feminist Mary Astell attempted unsuccessfully to persuade Montagu to overcome this conflict and to publish, having seen what was perhaps an early version of the embassy compilation and unhesitatingly described it “as a formidable challenge to the supremacy of men writers” (1978, 49). But perhaps Astell mistook Montagu’s cause. For by the time she saw the letters the constitution of the forces aligned against the Walpolian Whigs had altered; and if Montagu did view the embassy letters as of possible utility in that cause then it must have been clear at this point that they needed to be re-compiled. This does not of course explain why the letters had to wait until the 1760s for publication. Perhaps Montagu merely lost her nerve or became satisfied by the publication of her anonymous political journalism of the 1730s. All I am suggesting is that the letters were prepared for publication during the 1720s and that such preparation can be read as party political in intent. In the next section of this chapter I detail a way of reading the *Turkish Embassy Letters* that might have allowed Montagu as a woman to ‘create a stature’ for herself within the ‘public’ realm: a way of exploiting ‘private’ letters. After all, her part in the embassy to Constantinople was widely known and celebrated in engravings and she may well have hoped to make political use of this celebrity.

“The *asmak*, or Turkish vail, is become not only very easy but agreeable to me ...”⁹

Deliberation on the precise meaning of Montagu’s attachment to the Turkish veil and to Turkish people and culture in general drives many recent readings of the *Turkish Embassy Letters*; and is thus likely to be of crucial importance in understanding the manner in which Montagu went about her intervention in the Whig cause. But given

the fact that less than half of the embassy letters are written from Turkey this seems surprising, as does the insistence on the “resurgence of interest in Montagu under the rubric of colonial discourse and Orientalism, within the terms described by Edward Said” (Landry 1998, 314). Most of this interest, including work by Srinivas Aravamudan (1995), Elizabeth Bohls (1994), Joseph Lew (1991), Lisa Lowe (1991), and Cynthia Lowenthal (1994)¹⁰ consists of attempts to defend or to refute the ‘monolithic’ form of Orientalism proposed by Said. Of course in writing about Turkey Montagu necessarily became involved in “the offensive idiom of early Orientalism” (Bohls 1994, 181). But this involvement has been allowed to obscure what seems to have been Montagu’s conscious choice of the travel letter as a vehicle for political propaganda.

To my mind this confusion results from a failure to see a metaphoric meaning—running across the travels in Europe, Turkey, and north Africa that constitute the embassy letters—in Montagu’s donning of the Turkish veil. In Adrianople Montagu makes it clear that the “perpetual Masquerade” (328) enforced upon Turkish women by the veil leads only to the fooling of jealous husbands and then to “Intrigue” (328). Montagu herself makes no such use of the veil. Rather, once in Constantinople she makes it clear that even if the “asmak, or Turkish vail” had not become easy and agreeable to her “I would be content to endure some inconveniency to content a passion so powerfull with me as Curiosity” (397). She is determined to do so because wearing the veil is the only way for a woman to see and to walk about the streets of Constantinople; and she will not be like the French Ambassadress at Pera who “will return to France (I believe) without ever having been there” (397). In this way the wearing of the veil becomes a means of gaining a privileged and uninterrupted view not normally allowed to women.¹¹ And what I am suggesting is that Montagu’s donning of the veil in order to see Constantinople is analogous to her gaining of a series of distances from England, by travel, in order to view her own country from privileged vantage points; that the veil itself is a metaphor for the means by which she conveys those vantages back to England: the letter. Recall at this point Mme de Sévigné’s description of “a thick piece of crape” between herself and her daughter; the “meurtrière” between the narrator of the

'Envois' and his lover; and "that dash between us" which Dorothy Osborne describes to Sir William Temple. Rather than blocking communication, however, this sense (common to many letter writers) of something between the addresser and the addressee of a letter is what Montagu feels allows her, as a woman, to make political communications. Without the veil, without the vast distance that she has put between herself and England, she would not have been suffered to do so. This is revealed by an engraving of "Lady M-y W-r-t-l-y M-nt-g-e" as 'The Female Traveller', prints of which were in circulation soon after her return from the embassy.¹² Below the figure of Montagu *'In the Turkish Dress'* is the following inscription:

Let Men who glory in their better sense,
Read, hear, and learn Humility from hence;
No more let them Superior Wisdom boast,
They can but equal M-nt-g-e at most.

In the engraving Montagu holds pointedly in her hand, between herself and the viewer, either a letter of her own that she has not yet posted or a letter that she has just received.¹³ She does not look out at the viewer but instead appears to be arrested, her right hand abstractedly held out, in the act of looking at something off to her left. It is the implication of distance, by means of reference to the figure of the letter, which is the source of the "Humility" which can be learned "from hence". After all the *"Turkish Dress"* itself can be worn as easily in London as in Constantinople. In this sense the engraving acts almost as an advertisement for the political wisdom to be found within the as yet unpublished *Turkish Embassy Letters*. Precisely: just as she dons a veil to see Constantinople, in the writing of her letters Montagu puts an imaginary epistolary space between herself and England in order to open up a new front on which to fight out the continuing battles of 'the rage of party'; and to provide a new reflected view of England, often achieved through a Swiftian kind of satire, which would be advantageous to the Walpolian Whigs.¹⁴

It was only natural that Montagu should have adopted such a strategy for the exploitation of epistolary space. For on top of developments already outlined in the rise of the Post Office during the Interregnum and Restoration, Dickinson notes that

one of the consequences of the Revolution settlement of 1689 and attendant Williamite wars with absolutist France was that “to raise the necessary taxation and to provide the vital supplies for the armed forces, the Government had to expand such administrative institutions as the Treasury, the revenue departments, and the Post Office” (1973, 15). Walpole, in particular, set about exploiting the enlarged Post Office in every way possible. For example, Beckett notes that during the 1720s and 1730s central oversight ensured that “the links between local government and Westminster were maintained by agencies such as the customs and the post office” (1987, 12); Speck that an example of the government’s electoral influence in some boroughs is the fact that “the Post Office employed a significant proportion of the voters of Harwich” (1987, 54); and Clyve Jones that “Walpole had the advantage over the opposition with the use of the Post Office for the distribution of printed propaganda” (1987, 104). The Post Office even had a hand in the stubbing out of the last really dangerous ember of Jacobite activity before the 1740s: for as Kenneth Ellis notes: “interceptions [of letters] warned the government of the plans of disaffected subjects, such as [Bishop] Atterbury, banished on this evidence in 1723” (1958, 71). Nor was it only the government that exploited the Post Office at this time. Howard Robinson notes that the “Revolution resulted in a much greater use of the Post Office ... Freedom of communication, not only of ideas but of letters, greatly increased” (1948, 77). Amidst a host of new developments, including “the settling of additional cross posts and the greater use of byposts” (81) and the unification of the postal services of the British Isles under an Act of 1711 which “brought the postal arrangements up to date” (Robinson 1964, 39), it is hardly surprising that Montagu leapt at the chance of serving the Whigs in a new and uncharted field. Not least because the very newness of this field meant that activity there, although it was supported by the services of a public body, was not subject to proscriptions against publication by aristocratic women. Elizabeth Cook argues that the publication in the eighteenth century of supposedly private letters—at the “historical moment between manuscript and print, private correspondence and published text”—generated a Habermasian “kind of hybrid space, neither fully public nor properly private” (1996,

2 and 77). My contention is that with the rise of the Post Office, and the constant possibility of the interception of letters, the sending of ordinary letters did the same.¹⁵

The view that Montagu has broken her connection with England, and hence that consideration of epistolary space is not significant, is widespread amongst commentators. For instance, Landry notes that "In typical imperial fashion, Montagu regards the purpose of travel to foreign parts as escape from domestic conventions, from scandal and the social demands of home" (1998, 315); and Desai that "in travelling to the East she was able to break away from the rigid confinements ... of her own society" (1994, xxvi). Others draw repeated attention in their analysis of Montagu's letters to the connections between each stage of her travels and England, but without examining the nature of those connections. For instance Isobel Grundy speaks of Montagu's letters as "a *lifeline* ... that kept her *in touch* ... [and] *built a bridge* ... [and that] kept Lady Mary *linked*" (1997, xxi, my italics). Still others dwell only on the negative aspects of the distance between a letter writer and a letter reader. Lowenthal draws attention to "the tenuousness of the system" upon which Montagu had to rely in order to send her letters; and to the fact that "once comfortably settled on the Continent, Lady Mary had to depend on a foreign post whose services were often erratic and whose delayed delivery increased both the emotional distance and the possibility that the letter itself might be lost" (1994, 16 and 17). All in all, Lowenthal concludes that "it seems almost miraculous that letters arrived at all and that people did not, in frustration, give up writing altogether" (19). I am not arguing that Montagu did not feel some of this frustration at different times in her life: she clearly did. But in the *Turkish Embassy Letters* the nature of the connection between Montagu on her travels, and England, becomes an essential part of the meaning of the letters. That this has not often enough been taken into account is perhaps the result of a refusal to take the form of Montagu's writings seriously—a refusal engendered by "the complicated problem of their composition and their relationship to actual letters" (Halsband 1965, xiv). Lew, for one, notes that the embassy letters "refuse to be 'purely' epistolary" (1991, 433). But the judgement that the embassy letters are partly fictional should not interfere with judgement of the fiction in terms of its form

as letters. For however Montagu altered the content of her original letters she resolutely did not alter their form.

In her attempts to arrive at a definition of the letter Violi decides that “the letter can be defined not only as a linguistic production belonging to discourse rather than to historical narrative, but also as a genre in which the traces of utterance (which separate discourse from story) are constitutive of the genre” (1985, 151). Problems occur, however, in that the definition of other narrative forms such as the diary invariably “entails reference to the Situation of Utterance” (151). And yet:

There is, however, a specific feature which differentiates the letter from other autobiographical texts and which concerns the setting up of a *distance* within the text separating both the narrator from the narratee, and the time and place of the narrator from the time and place of the narratee. (155)

In all other texts, Violi argues, “the gap between the locus of narration and the locus of reception is implicit and totally irrelevant” (156). This distance, in space and in time, is constantly alluded to in the *Turkish Embassy Letters*. To Alexander Pope Montagu writes: “that distance which makes the continuation of your Freindship improbable has very much encreas’d my Faith for it” (262); and of “the great Gulph between You and Me” (367); to Lady Mar that: “You fancy me at 40 miles distance and forget that after so long an Absence I cant understand hints” (291). Again to Frances Hewet that: “Before you can receive this, you must consider all things as six months old, which now appear new to me” (309); and to Lady Mar that: “but for me that am in arrear at least 2 months news, all that seems very stale with you would be fresh and sweet here” (326). Not only this but we are constantly reminded that the gaining of this distance from England was not easy and hence deserves respect as something uncommon. Crossing the channel Montagu and her fellow travellers “had the ill fortune of a storm ... and we were all Sunday night toss’d very handsomely” (248-9); and crossing at night by carriage “the frightfull Precipices that divide Bohemia from Saxony ... [without] an inch of Space between the wheels and the precipice ... I perceiv’d ... our Postillions nodding on horseback while the Horses were on a full Gallop” (281). It is precisely the special perspective gained by

Montagu's "space-time distance" (Violi 1985, 156) that gives her intervention in support of the Whigs value.¹⁶

But what are we to make of Montagu's comments on travel in her penultimate embassy letter to the Abbé Conti? Back safe at Dover, Montagu first identifies in herself a hitherto unknown partiality for her own country and then decides:

That partiality was certainly given us by Nature to prevent Rambling, the Effect of an Ambitious thirst after knowledge which we are not form'd to Enjoy. All we get by it is fruitless Desire of mixing the different pleasures and conveniences which are given to Different parts of the World and cannot meet in any one of them. (444)

Aravamudan argues that this turn of thought signifies that "Travel narrative, after flirting with cultural crossover, becomes a complicated acknowledgement of the superiority of the return home" (1995, 90). And yet this is entirely to miss the satiric and propagandist element ever present in the embassy letters even at their close. For Montagu goes on to declare her assurance that despite all her own learning and ability to speak several languages:

I think the honest English Squire more happy who verily beleives the Greek wines less delicious than March beer, that the African fruits have not so fine a flavour as golden Pipins, and the Becáfiguas of Italy are not so well tasted as a rump of Beef, and that, in short, there is no perfect Enjoyment of this Life out of Old England. (444)

It is difficult to believe that Montagu does not have in mind here Joseph Addison's description in *The Freeholder* of 5th March 1716 of a meeting on the road with a representative "of that rank of men, who are commonly distinguished by the title of *Fox-hunters*" (1974, 43). Addison describes with some consternation how, when the conversation turned to the weather, this High Church Tory squire declared to him "that there had been no good weather since the Revolution" (43). Upon hearing the squire speak ill of foreigners Addison asked if he had ever travelled:

He told me, he did not know what travelling was good for, but to teach a man to ride the great horse, to jabber French, and to talk against passive-

obedience: To which he added, that he scarce ever knew a traveller in his life who had not forsook his principles, and lost his hunting seat. (45)

The Montagus and Addison were closely connected: indeed it was with Addison that Edward Wortley Montagu had completed his version of the Grand Tour in the early years of the century. It is, then, in a spirit of the closing down of Enlightenment that Montagu returns to England: symbolized (ironically as Montagu later spent much of her life abroad) by the closing line of her letter to the Abbé Conti in praise of the unenlightened life: "I pray God I may think so for the rest of my Life, and since I must be contented with our scanty allowance of Daylight, that I may forget the enlivening Sun of Constantinople" (444).

Reading the *Turkish Embassy Letters* as an intervention on behalf of the Walpolian Whigs

I have already argued that the indirect target of Montagu's propaganda during the period of the sending of the embassy letters was the Tory party; but during the period of their compilation the situation becomes less clear cut and Walpole's enemies more diffuse. Hence Montagu's compiled letters need to fight on more than one front. Christine Gerrard refers to "the literary 'giants' who directed their formidable talents against Walpole—Fielding, Pope, Swift, Gay, Thomson" (1994, vii). The political heritage of these 'giants' was the "Whig 'haemorrhage' [which] began in 1725 when Walpole's former ally William Pulteney (furious at being passed over as Secretary of State) resigned office and joined the former High-Tory Bolingbroke to harangue Walpole from the *Craftsman*" (19). The 'giants' pioneered a new form of political opposition. For as J. R. Jones notes, before 1688 "politicians and demagogues opposed to the court found in anti-popery the cause that legitimized their position and behavior ... The Revolution put an end to this opposition strategy; accusations of corruption provided a substitute" (1992b, 42). The coalition of Tories and Whigs that gradually formed themselves into an uneasy opposition to Walpole's government during the 1720s specifically criticized the Revolution Settlement as its "system of representation increasingly worked in favour of an oligarchy" (Jones 1992a, 9).

Montagu herself certainly did not subscribe to this view. In 'An Expedient to put a stop to the spreading Vice of Corruption' she satirises such accusations and criticisms by taking them to their logical conclusion: "But How can we prevent this contagion after it has gain'd so strong a Head that it passes among Foreigners for a part of our Constitution? I humbly propose we may have no more Parliaments ..." (1977, 101).¹⁷ Again, *The Nonsense of Common Sense* was directed specifically at supporters of the opposition such as her own cousin Henry Fielding, and thus it is more than likely that in common with Walpole and his ministers Montagu "regarded the Revolution as a completed achievement" (Jones 1992b, 48).

There has been much recent debate about the nature of the opposition to Walpole after he had become 'prime minister.' For example, Henry Horwitz argues that "[J. G. A.] Pocock's dichotomy of 'old' and 'modern' Whigs ... is at odds with the prevailing consensus that the primary division in English politics between 1689 and at least the early 1720s, if not the 1740s, was that between Whig and Tory" (1992, 275). However, Phillipson is surely correct to identify the series of bitter debates that took place in the years leading up to the fall of Walpole in 1742 as centring on "'revolution principles' whose meaning remained obscure and bitterly controversial" (1993, 211). For the Walpolian Whigs, as Robert Eccleshall points out, "the conduct of government was best left to an economically secure and leisured class: men of rank and fortune whose opportunity to seek enlightenment and to cultivate political virtue endowed them with a unique capacity to defend liberty" (1986, 13). What they were to defend liberty from was "either the anarchic impulses of the masses or the despotic inclinations of the Crown" (5). In agreement with this view was John, Lord Hervey, whom Montagu first met in 1721 and with whom she maintained a correspondence later on in life; and who argued (in his *Ancient and modern liberty stated and compar'd* (1734)) that it was "the Glorious Revolution [that] heralded the dawn of real liberty in England" (quoted in Eccleshall 1986, 14). However, others felt that liberty was very much still threatened in the 1720s and the 1730s "by Walpolian modernity, urban complexity, credit, commerce, and proto-capitalism" (Gerrard 1994, 4). In the face of such arguments taking place as Montagu compiled her letters I argue that the *Turkish Embassy Letters* can be read

not only as an attack on the Tory party but also as an opening gambit in a battle against Whigs who called themselves Patriots; and in which a coherent and sustained defence of what Montagu understood to be Revolution principles was as necessary as it had been between 1716 and 1718. In such a reading the figure of the Whig schism invoked by the dates of the original letters would act as a powerful argument against Whigs not loyal to Walpole during the 1720s. Montagu's defence, then, can be seen as a response to Daniel Defoe's call, in his *A Review of the State of the British Nation* of 1710, for a renewed declaration of "the very principles" (1974, 16) of the Revolution Settlement.

These principles are expressed by the embassy letters in a variety of ways. The first twenty two and the last eight are sent back to London from various European destinations. They therefore form a coherent commentary on the forms of government in place across that continent; just as, according to Michael Foot, in the 'A Voyage to Brobdingnag' section of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is found "the nearest effort he ever made to describe his own notion of an ideal State" (1967, 8). Holmes notes that one of the main consequences of the wars with France attendant on the Revolution of 1688 was "the great expansion in [Britain's] commerce with Spain and the Mediterranean ports since 1660" (1993, 231). To illustrate this benefit acquired since the days of Charles II and James II, Montagu makes a series of observations on free and absolutist states. For example to Lady Mar she describes how in Rotterdam, "the shops and warehouses are of a surprizing neatness and Magnificence, fill'd with an incredible Quantity of fine Merchandize, and so much cheaper than what we see in England"; and how the "common Servants and little shop Women here are more nicely clean than most of our Ladys" (249). In contrast travelling back through France from Lyon to Paris Montagu informs Lady Rich that, "While the post horses are chang'd, the whole town comes out to beg, with such miserable starv'd faces and thin, tatter'd Cloaths, they need no other Eloquence to perswade [one of] the wretchedness of their Condition" (438). Only at Fontainebleau is there any "Magnificence ... [with] 1,500 rooms in the King's hunting Palace" (438). Such passages seem designed to warn Montagu's countrymen and women of the dangers of absolutism; which are always present in a country still

under the rule—however benevolent that rule might appear to be—of a monarchy. Moreover, Montagu is adhering very closely to party orthodoxy here: for as Holmes notes “the Whigs were passionately anti-French and staunchly pro-Dutch after 1702” (1993, 340). That she associates shocking disparities in wealth very much with forms of government is revealed to Lady Bristol in a letter describing the passage through Germany on the way to Turkey:

tis impossible not to observe the difference between the free Towns and those under the Government of absolute Princes (as all the little Sovereigns of Germany are). In the first there appears an air of Commerce and Plenty. The streets are well built and full of people neatly and plainly dress'd, the shops loaded with Merchandize, and the commonalty clean and cheerfull. In the other, a sort of shabby finery, a Number of dirty people of Quality tawder'd out, Narrow nasty streets out of repair, wretchedly thin of Inhabitants, and above halfe of the common sort asking alms. (254)

One figure that Montagu uses to emphasise these differences is that of the post itself. In Rotterdam she expects excellent postal services and informs Lady Mar that she hopes to be able to entertain her by letter very often. She continues, however, “but it is not from Holland that you must expect a disinterested offer. I can write enough in the stile of Rotterdam to tell you plainly, in one word, I expect Returns of all the London News. You see I have allready learnt to make a good Bargain ...” (250). This model of a well functioning commerce of letters is not repeated in other countries. From Hanover Montagu informs Lady Bristol that “nothing was ever worse regulated than the post in most parts of Germany” (285); and in Paris she learns that her sister has “not receiv'd my late Letters” (440). In this way the very form of Montagu's travel writing comments on the economic systems of the countries she passes through: with the commerce in letters proceeding as if by clockwork in republican Holland but dangerously impeded in several of the German states and in absolutist France.

Nor is the regime in Turkey free from criticism; in fact at least one observation provides a salient lesson on Revolution principles to those back home in England. In Adrianople Montagu informs Lady Bristol that the “Government here is entirely in the hands of the Army, and the Grand Signor with all his absolute power

as much a slave as any of his Subjects, and trembles at a Janizary's frown" (322). It was just such an army which, as Jones points out, the exiled James II realised he would need if he ever recovered his kingdom: an army "not designed for foreign wars ... but for internal security" (1992b, 34). In contrast is Montagu's claim, in a letter to the Princess of Wales, that the balmy climate of Adrianople can never be preferred to that of frosty England "while we are bless'd with an easy Government under a King who makes his own Happyness consist in the Liberty of his people, and chooses rather to be look'd upon as their Father than their Master" (311-2). To the Tory opponents of the Whigs and Hanoverians Montagu makes from Adrianople a clear plea: "I cannot help wishing ... that the Parliament would send hither a Ship Load of your passive Obedient Men, that they might see a[r]bitrary Government in its clearest, strongest Light, where tis hard to Judge whither the prince, people or Ministers are most miserable" (322-3). Later on, for example during the late 1720s and 1730s, Montagu's observations on the regime in Turkey would have clearly aligned her with Walpole, who attempted to avoid the raising of armies and the making of war at any cost in order to keep the Land Tax down—in the face of constant clamouring from a Patriot opposition for war with Spain. As a result this letter reveals Montagu fighting on two fronts at the same time.

Is it any coincidence that the letter from Adrianople and the letter about the German towns are addressed to Lady Bristol?—or that the letter about the advantages of republicanism over absolute monarchy is addressed to Lady Mar? Hardly. For as Halsband notes, "It would ... seem that in the main Lady Mary compiled her Embassy Letters from actual letters which she 'edited' by transposing sections and otherwise manipulating them to achieve a more artistic collection" (1965, xvi). To my mind this achievement can be seen as political as much as it is artistic. For Lady Mar, despite the fact that she was Montagu's younger sister, was most likely to be associated at the time with her husband the earl of Mar: who in September 1715 had raised the Pretender's standard in the north-east Highlands of Scotland and attempted, unsuccessfully, to seize Edinburgh castle. Despite this failure Mar's actions constituted "the most serious mainland uprising the Jacobites ever launched" (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 98). After the failure of the 'Fifteen Lord Mar, described

by Holmes as “that least predictable of rebels” (1993, 318), fled Britain and took up exile in Paris. Lady Bristol was Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Charlotte, wife of George I, and hence associated with the side of the Whig schism that pitted Stanhope and Sunderland against Walpole and Townshend. Not only this but she was “notoriously addicted to card playing” (Jack 1994, 169) and thus likely to be linked with the excesses of court life, the destructiveness of which Montagu demonstrated in her description of French rural life.¹⁸ In contrast Montagu also addresses letters to Caroline, Princess of Wales, to Lady Rich (who became Lady in Waiting to Caroline when she was Queen), and to Jane Smith (a maid of honour to the Princess of Wales). This triumvirate hence represent the other side of the schism.¹⁹ The importance of such attention to the addressees of letters is emphasised by Violi in her statement that “an explicitly marked narrator/narratee alliance in the text is a necessary condition for the identification of the genre” (1985, 152).

Halsband notes with interest Montagu’s claim in later life that “I was educated in the principles of Old Whiggism” (1956, 8). Similarly, Caroline Robbins identifies Edward Wortley Montagu as a member of a group of men associated with Robert Molesworth, sometimes calling themselves ‘Old Whigs’, who for decades after the Revolution “worked to secure its benefits and extend its constitutional reforms” (1961, 88). And filling out the picture, Desai describes how as early as 1697 at a gathering “of eminent Whigs with literary and political ambitions at the Kit-Kat Club, Lord Kingston nominated his daughter Mary as their toast for the year” (1994, vii).²⁰ Desai suggests that it was simply the adulatory element of this childhood memory that Montagu relished in later life; but perhaps rather this event represented for her a political baptism of fire. However, this Old Whig heritage was to return to haunt the Walpolian Whigs. For Gerrard notes that from the mid-1720s:

The traditional Old Whig plea—pristine Saxon virtue under threat—supplied the opposition with a powerful tool to attack the ‘spurious’ Whiggery of a corrupt government. The ministry countered opposition claims to Whig ‘liberty’ by appropriating the arguments of the royalist historian Bradley, who had asserted that medieval England had been a feudal tyranny in which parliamentary liberty had been impossible. Writing from a modernist perspective, Court Whigs dated English liberties from no earlier than 1688 ... (1994, 104)

Gerrard points out that “Although the Patriots’ ‘past age’ is sometimes located in ancient Greece or republican Rome, it is more often explicitly *British*” (99). Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* specifically bypass Britain before 1688, looking back nostalgically not to “a simpler, ‘traditional’ rural England” (4) as did Tories and opposition Whig Patriots but to a sophisticated classical past, encompassing the Trojan, Carthaginian, and early Greek empires. She does so by means of loaded descriptions of lands through which she has travelled. For example, in her long letter to the Abbé Conti addressed from Tunis Montagu describes a tour through what she terms “the most agreeable part of the world” (416). So, she describes Troy as “the greatest City in the world” (420), the Isle of Tenedos as “in those days very rich and well peopled” (421), and “the Famous City of Carthage” (427). Most significantly she enthuses that:

’tis impossible to imagine any thing more agreeable than this Journey would have been between 2 and 3,000 years since, when, after drinking a dish of tea with Sappho, I might have gone the same evening to visit the temple of Homer in Chios, and have pass’d this voyage in takeing plans of magnificent Temples, delineating the miracles of Statuaries and converseing with the most polite and most gay of humankind. Alas! Art is extinct here. (423)

To my mind such a passage is no neutral description of travel. Montagu’s emphasis on the word “polite” is important. For her embassy letters are clearly a contribution to a cult of manners and politeness, inaugurated by Steele and Addison, that was “‘ancient’ in the ethical sense that it preferred Ciceronian and Epicurean manners and morals to those of Christian devotion” (Pocock 1993, 10). By these means she attacks the simple British past idealised by Tories and Patriots alike; involving herself in a process whereby “Both Court Whigs and their opponents still drew upon accounts of Britain’s Saxon or Trojan ‘originals’ for political purposes” (Gerrard 1994, 102). In doing so, it would seem that she consigned much of her Old Whig education and heritage to history.

Montagu’s embassy letters satirise the manners and morals of a series of European and Turkish cities and towns; against which can be contrasted a classical ideal, only attainable by a very select group, that is invoked in her letter to the Abbé

Conti. Such attainment implicitly cements the inviolable right to power of Court Whigs such as herself and her husband; and puts them above the charges of corruption with which Walpole's followers were beset. In that these letters have either English addressees or—in their compiled version—hoped for English readers, they can be seen to represent an argument in favour of Steele's and Addison's form of politeness; and against the manners of the simple traditional Britain that would later be taken up and championed by the Patriots. So, the philistinism of the modern Turks is drawn attention to in Montagu's "double regret on a Beautifull Temple of Theseus, which I am assur'd was allmost entire at Athens till the last Campaign in the Morea, that the Turks fill'd it with Powder and it was accidentally blown up" (422). In fact, all of Montagu's comments on the destructive nature of the war between the Turks and the Austrians, between whom Edward Wortley Montagu was supposed to arrange a truce, can be compared to the nobler aspects of the Trojan war including "the famous Duel of Menelaus and Paris" (420). Again, directly recalling Etherege's letters from Ratisbon, Montagu finds that manners in that town can be ascertained by the fact that "'tis publicly whisper'd as a piece of impertinent pride in me that I have hitherto been saucily civil to every body, as if I thought no body good enough to quarrel with" (258). The satiric element in the embassy letters is often missed. For instance the romantic love of Hero and Leander, remembered by Montagu as her ship lay at anchor in the Hellespont, or indeed of Apollo for Daphne recalled as she sailed past the Isle of Tenedos, can be compared with the amorous intentions of the women in Vienna and in Adrianople. From Vienna Montagu writes to Lady Rich sympathising with the difficulties of a mutual friend who has suffered "Mortifications" (269) in England (not described but implicitly related to her advancing years). Montagu assures her friend that these troubles are:

only owing to the barbarous Customs of our Country. Upon my word, if she was here she would have no other fault but being something too young for the Fashion ... A Woman till 5 and thirty is only look'd upon as a raw Girl and can possibly make no noise in the World till about forty ... and then that perplexing word Reputation has quite another meaning here than what you give it at London, and getting a Lover is so far from loseing, that 'tis properly getting reputation ... (269-70)

Halsband describes this as a piece of “comparative morality” (1956, 62) and takes Montagu at her word when she writes that “tis a considerable comfort to me to know there is upon Earth such a paradise for old Women” (270). But by the time of the compilation of the embassy letters Halsband himself is reporting Lady Rich as “giddy ... a decayed beauty ... [known for the fact that she] affected a girlish simplicity unsuited to her mature years” (1956, 115). Such a person did no good to the ambition of Court Whigs to be trusted with power and so the intention of this particular letter is far more likely to be satiric. The flighty character that Montagu assumes in this and other letters thus acts as a way of increasing the comedy at Lady Rich’s expense: when she neutrally ponders of the ‘paradise’ that “I don’t know what your Ladyship may think of this matter” (270) it is to be assumed that readers of the embassy letters would know very well what Lady Rich would think and laugh heartily at her folly into the bargain.²¹ What it is important to remember at this point is that Montagu’s satire here is not nostalgic for the manners of any kind of British past such as those of the court of Elizabeth I; and so in the context of the Patriot campaign is party political in intent.

Horwitz notes that some of Walpole’s defenders against opposition attacks argued that “the real danger to liberty in their day was posed by an overmighty Commons which ... could overturn the balance of the constitution and even lead to oppression of the subject” (1992, 273). To bolster such an argument it was important constantly to demonstrate the right to power of the Court Whigs. In *The Spectator*, 21st June 1712, Addison argues that “A Man of a Polite Imagination, is let into a great many Pleasures that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a Picture, and find an agreeable Companion in a Statue” (quoted in Bond 1965, 538). In response to such statements Bohls notes that:

By the early eighteenth century a consensus was beginning to emerge, articulated by British aestheticists like Addison, Shaftesbury, and Francis Hutcheson, that the aesthetic gaze must be sharply distinguished from ways of looking which incorporated what Kant ... would later call “vested interest”—“practical” needs and desires such as hunger, sexual lust, acquisitiveness, and so on. (1994, 188)

For example, the most important elements in the aesthetic philosophy of Lord Shaftesbury, according to Robbins, are the insistence on “the necessity for freedom for any kind of achievement ... an empirical approach ... [and] an immense self-reliance on matters of taste and morals” (1961, 129-30). It is this element that Montagu takes up in her embassy letters: imagining the epistolary space between herself and her addressees as a form of polite venue opposed to much of what she finds in Europe. Thus she describes to Lady Mar the court dress of the women of Vienna, which is “more monstrous and contrary to all common sense and reason than ’tis possible for you to imagine”:

They build certain fabricks of Gause on their heads about a yard high consisting of 3 or 4 storys, fortify’d with numberless yards of heavy riband. The foundation of this structure is a thing they call a Bourlé, which is exactly of the same shape and kind, but about 4 times as big, as those rolls our prudent milk maids make use of to fix their Pails upon. This machine they cover with their own Hair, which they mix with a great deal of false, it being a particular beauty to have their heads too large to go into a moderate Tub. (265)

In contrast in Rotterdam the fashion is for a “great variety of neat dresses (every Woman dressing her Head after her own Fashion)” (249). Montagu’s appreciative descriptions of the Turkish women at the baths in Sophia, of Fatima (the Kabya’s wife), and of the Sultana Hafise have been much discussed in terms of Orientalist discourse. It seems to me, however, that Montagu is most concerned to emphasise the veracity of her descriptions in comparison to those of earlier travel writers such as Sir Paul Rycault. It could be countered that Montagu merely perpetuates a discourse in which the Orient is viewed as an exotic ‘other.’ Lowe for instance argues that much travel literature in the eighteenth century “regulated the social quarrels besetting the old regimes of the period by transfiguring internal challenges to the social order into fantasies of external otherness” (1991, 31). And yet Montagu is clearly and deliberately engaging in these quarrels in the embassy letters, not regulating them: espousing the aesthetic philosophy of a party. Bohls notes that “Shaftesbury’s influential aesthetics is anything but disinterested. It incorporates a network of gendered assumptions about relationships of socioeconomic and aesthetic

power, presenting the aesthetic subject as a well-educated, propertied, white European man whose good taste enhances his prestige" (1994, 183). The same can equally be said of Addison's 'Man of a Polite Imagination.' Bohls provides an excellent analysis of the complicated relation of Montagu as a woman to these aesthetics; and of her "mounting frustration with British culture for denying women the power and prestige of the aesthetic perceiver, and *a fortiori* of the aesthetic producer" (199). But as she does not take account of Montagu's commitment to the Whig cause, and of her ability to further that cause in epistolary space, Bohls cannot see beyond this frustration.

For although Montagu accepts that she cannot aspire to the condition of a man of taste in the traditional public sphere she does go to great lengths to construct herself as a woman of taste in epistolary space; thereby contributing to the aesthetic enterprise of such men as Steele and Addison—which has been described as "a form of propaganda designed to create a Whig false consciousness" (Phillipson 1993, 227). In fact she specifically extends the scope of this enterprise: for her descriptions of the baths at Sophia are what "no book of travells could inform you of. 'Tis no less than Death for a Man to be found in one of these places " (315). Her first claim to the title of woman of taste resides in her aristocracy; which is resolutely asserted. For instance she criticizes travel writers such as Jean Dumont because:

They never fail giving you an Account of the Women, which 'tis certain they never saw, and talking very wisely of the Genius of the Men, into whose Company they are never admitted, and very often describe Mosques, which they dare not peep into. The Turks are very proud, and will not converse with a Stranger they are not assur'd is considerable in his own Country. (368)

Her second claim is the association with Alexander Pope which is implied by the inclusion of seven letters addressed to him in the compiled embassy letters. So, in a letter written from Vienna she displays taste in her judgement of the Austrian comedies as "ridiculous" (263). In doing so she reveals the depth of her knowledge when she notes of the comedy that she "was very glad it happen'd to be the story of Amphitriton; that subject having been allready handled by a Latin, French and English Poet, I was curious to see what an Austrian Author would make of it" (263). In

another letter addressed to Pope from Adrianople Montagu discusses his translation of Homer and presents him with a Turkish poem which she has had especially translated for him. Finally, from Belgrade Village she supplies an itinerary of her activity: "Tuesday reading English, Wednesday Studying the Turkish Language (in which, by the way, I am already very learned), Thursday Classical Authors, Friday spent in Writing" (366). In addressing such letters only to Pope Montagu avoids the charge of presumption: for Pope, as a well known intellectual, can be assumed to have demanded such accounts. Montagu, then, is only obeying the epistolary protocol of not boring to death the specific addressee of a letter. And by doing so she gains access to a limited form of the public sphere, by the back door, for "In the eighteenth century, the letter, as an ostensibly private document, was a sanctioned, legitimate vehicle for women ... a domestic tool ... a simple instrument ... a conduit ... a bridge" (Lowenthal 1994, 3). It is by such means that Montagu asserts her credentials as a woman of taste; and so her ability to intervene in the Whig cause on behalf of Walpole. The very fact that she makes such an intervention then bolsters the right of the Court Whigs to the positions that they hold; and makes a nonsense of Patriot and Tory claims that by means of excessive and corrupt use of patronage Walpole had destroyed the liberties that had been won at the Revolution.

The embassy letters reveal their calculated partisanship in other ways. Phillipson reveals that the question of what kind of church had been preserved by the Revolution was central to the politics of the reigns of both Anne and the early Hanoverians:

Was it a Calvinist church, as most Anglicans, jurors and non-jurors alike, believed; a visible church, whose authority descended from the Apostles, whose doors were only open to those who were prepared to engage in its sacraments? Or was it, as Whigs and dissenters thought, a latitudinarian church, to be conceived of in Lutheran terms, as a part of an invisible church, which was co-extensive with the nation and open to all sincere and well-affected Protestants? (1993, 213)

In the embassy letters Montagu immersed herself in this debate on the side of the Whigs. From Nijmegen to Sarah Chiswell, whose brother was Rector of Holme Pierrepont, she describes the "antick Gestures" of the parson of the French church

and notes "I'm sure your brother will excuse a digression in favour of the Church of England. You know, speaking disrespectfully of Calvinists is the same thing as speaking honourably of the Church" (252). To Pope she admonishes, "Don't fancy, however, that I am infected by the air of these popish Countrys, thô I have so far wander'd from the Discipline of the Church of England to have been last Sunday at the Opera" (262). Directed towards Pope, "a Tory with Jacobite leanings" (Landry 1998, 307) this was no doubt inflammatory. And as Cynthia Wall argues, in her analysis of the correspondence between Pope and Montagu, throughout Montagu maintained her "ability to preserve the psychological and imaginative distance between them" (1992, 232). Was this, though, as Wall argues, a strategy to avoid a form of literary seduction that "looks more like attempted rape" of Montagu by Pope (232)? Perhaps in the lost original letters. But in the compiled embassy letters, which we have, it is much more likely that the maintained distance is a function of political and religious differences between the pair. For consistently throughout the letters Montagu reveals herself fiercely antagonistic to ceremonialism in terms of relics or ornament, providing a long list of absurdities that she finds in western European churches including a "wooden head of our Saviour which they assur'd me spoke during the Seige of Vienna" (276) and "a crucifix that they assur'd me had spoke very wisely to the Emperor Leopold" (279).

Sometimes Montagu seems to go even further and demonstrate an affinity not with a Lutheran vision of the Church of England but with an English or British Enlightenment that was "anti-clerical ... in that of the English and Anglo-Irish deists and freethinkers" (Pocock 1993, 9). So, in Nuremberg Montagu notes that the "Lutherans are not quite free from these follies. I have seen here in the principal Church a large piece of the Cross set in Jewels, and the point of a Spear which they told me very gravely was the same that pierce'd the side of Our Saviour" (255). Holmes notes that a particular characteristic of deism was "rejection of all the elements of mystery and revelation in orthodox Christianity and of the authority of any priesthood"; it was "a temper rather than a creed ... [and] relied as much on ridicule as on solid argument" (1993, 401 and 370). Montagu certainly seems to have had such a temper. There is no evidence whatsoever that Montagu identified

herself as a deist, but the embassy letters that describe her stay in Belgrade as the guest of the effendi Achmed Bey bring deism into the equation in a particularly interesting way. Montagu describes this man to Pope as follows: "He has wit, and is more polite than many Christian men of Quality" (308); and to the Abbé Conti as a member of a group of scholars "who have engross'd all the Learning and almost all the Wealth of the Empire" (317). During the course of three weeks lodging at Belgrade Montagu had ample opportunity to converse with Achmed Bey. Finding that Mohammedism is divided into as many sects as Christianity she concludes in a letter to the Abbé Conti:

But the most prevailing Opinion, if you search into the Secret of the Effendis, is plain Deism, but this is kept from the people, who are amus'd with a thousand Different notions according to the different interest of their Preachers. (318-9)

Bey himself is resolutely not a fanatic. He surprises Montagu "by drinking Wine with the same freedom we did" with the explanation that although the prohibition is good for the "common people ... the Prophet never design'd to confine those that knew how to use it with moderation" (318). This aristocratic disdain for the commoner was, again, a characteristic of English deism which was very much viewed as "the preserve of the well-born and educated" (Holmes 1993, 371). The rationalism of the effendi's arguments later leads Montagu on to a discussion of the "diversity of Religions I have seen" (319-20), which is concluded by reference to a group of people who regularly attend the mosque on Fridays and the church on Sundays and of who "I beleive there is no other race of Mankind have so modest an opinion of their own capacity" (319). Montagu's admiration for the deistical Bey can be linked to disputes in England about heterodoxy which "had a large element of party politics in them. It was not unreasonably supposed that a Whig government was a reluctant prosecutor in ... cases [against deists]" (Langford 1989, 238). Thus Montagu's discussion of the various religions that she sees is an example not of "an eclectic relativism" (Aravamudan 1995, 71) but of the party rhetoric of a wing of the Whigs. And in this way it is easier to discount Lowenthal's claim that Montagu's "suggestion is that Islam is just a version of Western deism [which] serves to level

difference and deflate English superiority" (1994, 81). For her suggestion is in fact that the rational, cultured, and aristocratic effendis' support of deism can be used as yet another tool with which further to batter the High Church and the Tories.²²

I shall examine one last aspect of Montagu's letters which I interpret as a further intervention in the cause of the Whigs. This is her attempt, widely reported in all accounts of her life, to disseminate the benefits of her observation of what she terms "engrafting" as a form of inoculation against smallpox. So, to Sarah Chiswell Montagu reports from Adrianople a process whereby an:

old Woman comes with a nutshell full of the matter of the best sort of small-pox, and asks what veins you please to have open'd. She immediately rips open that you offer to her with a large needle ... and puts into the vein as much venom as can lye upon the head of her needle, and after binds up the little wound with a hollow bit of shell, and in this manner opens 4 or 5 veins ... The children or young patients play together all the rest of the day and are in perfect health till the 8th. Then the fever begins to seize 'em ... (339)

Montagu then reports the progress of the fever until health is regained. Taken together the letter constitutes a model in clinical observation that it is extraordinary to find in a private letter; especially as it is addressed to a childhood friend who ten years later was to die of smallpox. It is thus more than possible that when she set about the compilation of the embassy letters Montagu deliberately re-addressed this letter (either never sent or previously sent to someone else) to Sarah Chiswell in order to increase its emotional effect. Montagu's method in this letter is related to the empirical outlook that accompanied the rise of the New Science. And indeed in the letter to Chiswell Montagu doubts very much whether doctors back in England will have much interest in inoculation as it will be likely to "destroy such a considerable branch of their Revenue" (339); although she concludes that "if I live to return I may, however, have courage to war with 'em" (339). Montagu's attitude here is significant because, as Foot notes, Swift's 'A Voyage to Laputa, etc.' is "evidently directed against the scientists and philosophers of his own age" (1967, 8). So, at the Academy of Lagado, amidst a wealth of absurdities, Gulliver is forced to accept "a very close embrace (a compliment I could well have excused)" from the most ancient student of the Academy who has spent many years attempting an

“operation to reduce human excrement to its original food, by separating the several parts, removing the tincture which it receives from the gall, making the odour exhale, and scumming off the saliva” (Swift 1967, 224). To my mind Montagu includes in her embassy letters a detailed observation of the operation of engrafting precisely to combat such attacks on the new science and its code of empiricism: which in that it “disturb[ed] the roots of some long-standing Christian assumptions” (Holmes 1993, 143) was scarcely amenable to the High-Church Tory party.

Epilogue: The publication of the *Turkish Embassy Letters*

The various reasons why Montagu did not publish the embassy letters in the 1720s—and so intervene directly in the Whig cause—have already been discussed. Why then did she sanction publication in 1762? Ever since July 1739 Montagu had lived a life of restless wandering on the continent; wholly separated from her husband and intermittently in amorous pursuit of the much younger Francesco Algarotti. At all times, wherever she went, she carried the compiled embassy letters with her. Finally, upon hearing the news of Wortley’s death in 1761, she agreed to return home. Waiting to embark for England from Rotterdam on the final leg of her journey she lodged with the Reverend Benjamin Sowden. There, Halsband reports that:

If she let him read her Embassy Letters, he then persuaded her that they should be published—as Mary Astell had tried to do. She agreed because she felt her life drawing to an end. (She had told Miss Astell they were “condemned to obscurity during her life”). It is a matter of fact that she handed over to him her autograph copy of the letters, and inscribed on the cover: “These two volumes are given to the Rev. Benjamin Sowden ... to be disposed of as he thinks proper. This is the will and design of M. Wortley Montagu.” (1956, 278-9)

To my mind this is a very unsatisfactory explanation for the final publication of the letters; although there is little doubt that Montagu would not have published them during her lifetime. After all, in his biography Halsband has described a woman consistently committed to various causes throughout her life. Is there, then, another reason why she might have wanted to sanction publication in 1762?

In 1758 Halsband reports that Montagu was in Venice and that she became embroiled in a row with the English Resident there, John Murray. The row became so intense and Murray so obnoxious that she was several times on the verge of quitting the city, although she had nowhere else to go: "She blamed his enmity on politics: that he accused her of favouring William Pitt, co-leader of the new coalition government, while he zealously supported the opposition faction" (Halsband 1956, 266). Pitt was notoriously unpopular with George II; and was later remembered as "strongly against the arbitrary and harsh policy towards the American colonies" (Magnusson 1990, 297). It is therefore not surprising that Pitt gained the support of Montagu, who was always ready to attack absolutist tendencies: she had only favoured the future George II over his father during the late 1710s and 1720s as a means of obtaining preferment for Walpole and the supremacy of the Whigs. After the accession of George III in 1760, however, it was Lord Bute, Montagu's own son-in-law, who:

became the main instrument for breaking the power of the Whigs and establishing the personal rule of the monarch through parliament. He was made prime minister in 1762, replacing the popular Pitt, thus making him the most disliked politician in the country. (Magnusson 1990, 237)

This was against all Montagu's Whig beliefs, as expressed concertedly in the embassy letters: especially as the new king was "Eager to govern as well as reign ... [and] felt certain that his own way was the right one, and that were it followed all would go well" (577). The years in between the compilation of the embassy letters and their publication had seen, as I have said, a long period of stability under Walpole and the Pelhams. But Holmes identifies "the miscellaneous coalitions of factions or 'connections' into which the parliamentary Whigs of mid-Hanoverian Britain ... disintegrated by the 1760s" (1993, 335). In fact, then, the early 1760s were the first time since the 1720s when a firm statement of 'Whig principles' was needed; especially when expressed as subtly and insidiously as in Montagu's embassy letters.

Montagu must have known of the extent of her daughter's and son-in-law's objection to the publication of the letters. Their objection was very nearly decisive. For after much persuasion Bute managed to obtain the letters from Sowden in order

to prevent publication, but by a strange mischance the letters had been borrowed by “two English gentlemen” (Halsband 1956, 288) and copied the night before he surrendered them: and henceforward publication could not be avoided. As Halsband makes clear the letters met with immediate success and extravagant praise: “Voltaire confirmed the high praise, and spread it on the Continent through the *Gazette Littéraire de l'Europe*; her letters, he said ... seemed written for all nations wishing to be instructed” (1956, 289). Indeed, the letters “are Lady Mary’s valid credential for a place in the European ‘Enlightenment’” (Halsband 1965, xiv). Thus the letters were very much capable of the kind of intervention that I have traced in the course of this chapter. Not only this, but their eventual publication coincided, after a long period of Pelhamite stability, with what Holmes and Szechi describe as the cusp of a new age of “profound political change ... the rebirth of ‘party’ in an enduring, ideological form” (1993, 290); just as their original sending had coincided with the death of an earlier age of party. This is no coincidence but a measure of the use Montagu hoped to make of her letters’ ability to make interventions in epistolary space.

REFERENCES

¹ Robert Halsband notes that the “compilation of pseudo-letters” (1965, xiv) that constitute the embassy correspondence were most likely put together sometime before Montagu showed her two small albums of copied letters to Mary Astell in 1724. This does not, however, preclude the possibility that Montagu made significant amendments or additions to the letters after 1724.

² See Geoffrey Holmes and Daniel Szechi (1993) and Paul Langford (1989).

³ Commentators who do draw attention to this aspect of the embassy letters do so only in passing: for instance Srinivas Aravamudan notices in one of the letters not sent from Turkey “whiggish sympathies” (1995, 73).

⁴ Amongst the contributors in literature to the political debate on the question of the choice between a ‘Whig’ or a ‘Tory’ constitution H. T. Dickinson (1974) includes writings by Charles Davenant, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Robert, Lord Molesworth, and Joseph Addison. To my mind he could well have included excerpts from the *Turkish Embassy Letters* upon the same question.

⁵ *The Nonsense of Common Sense* was a weekly newspaper written by Montagu, of which nine issues from 16th December 1737 to 14th March 1738 survive.

⁶ Holmes made this argument in 1969.

⁷ All references to the *Turkish Embassy Letters* are taken from Halsband (1965, volume one) and followed by a page number in brackets.

⁸ Elsewhere in the embassy series Montagu writes a maximum of two short letters on the same day. To my knowledge no other commentator has drawn attention to or provided any explanation for the anomaly of the dating of nine letters to a single day.

⁹ This quotation is taken from a letter to Lady Bristol, dated 10th April 1718.

¹⁰ Recent commentators on the embassy letters have been guilty of the most basic errors: sometimes seemingly in the attempt to subsume them into the fashionable discourse of colonial studies. The letters reveal quite clearly that Montagu left England for Holland in August 1716 and crossed into Turkish territory at Betsko in early February 1717 (the historical facts and timing of her encounter with the "Turkish convoy" (303) in that village have been discussed by Peter Horwarth (1992)). She left Turkey to return to England on 5th July 1718 giving a total stay of some seventeen months. She never returned. Joseph Lew, however, notes that it was "In 1717 [that] the Whigs sent Edward Wortley to Holland" (1991, 432); Elizabeth Bohls describes a "two-year stay" (1994, 180) in Turkey; and Lisa Lowe claims that Montagu spent "several years in Turkey" (1991, 35). Many of these commentators declare their intention to "focus upon a single letter" (Lew 1991, 432), which always turns out to be the letter most amenable to portraying Montagu as wholly bound up in a discourse of colonialism, which she was not.

¹¹ The veil is just one of a series of means by which Montagu gains such perspectives: in Rotterdam she goes "incognito, in my slippers" (249) and on her way to the baths at Sofia, "Designing to go incognito, I hir'd a Turkish Coach" (312).

¹² This engraving is reproduced as plate 7 by Halsband (1965), from a copy held in Princeton University Library.

¹³ Halsband identifies what Montagu has in her hand here as "a book" (1956, 100). But the object has lines of writing on its outside as well as its inside and appears far more like a letter, folded as was the custom. Moreover, at the time of the circulation of prints of this engraving Montagu was not known for any book-length work that readers might be able to obtain and hence 'learn' from; but she might well have been known by then as a great letter writer.

¹⁴ For these reasons I will not be concurring with Cynthia Lowenthal, who argues that Montagu sees Turkey through a "veil of romance" (1990, *passim*).

¹⁵ Elizabeth Cook traces the development of a literary public sphere between the 1720s and 1770s; beginning, then, at about the time of the first publication of Pope's familiar letters. Habermas traces the development of the political public sphere from the 1770s to the 1870s. As will already be clear, I trace the development of epistolary space from the 1650s to the 1750s.

¹⁶ In contrast Lowenthal argues that the value of a familiar letter is determined by the fact that it is "a material *object*, the product of both mental and physical activity ... the result of the effort is an object the recipient can touch, carry in a pocket, take out and read again" (1994, 15). Isn't this also the same of a book? My emphasis is on the value gained by awareness of the specific journey a letter has undertaken; the time that a letter has spent in epistolary space between the addresser and the addressee.

¹⁷ Halsband argues that in this essay "The fact that she attacks the *Craftsman* by name rather than *Common Sense* suggests that she was writing before *Common Sense* began publication in Feb. 1737" (1977, 100). Halsband himself does not seem to

acknowledge the satirical potential of the essay, merely pointing out that as a result of "its highly seditious expedient" (100) it could never have been published.

¹⁸ Lady Bristol had also appeared, under the guise of 'Cardelia', in 'The Bassette Table': one of the six of Montagu's widely distributed town eclogues. Halsband estimates that this poem was written some time before January 1716; and so Lady Bristol's status as shorthand for extravagance in the mind of Montagu would already have been known by at least some of the recipients of the embassy letters.

¹⁹ Princess Caroline had also appeared in one of the town eclogues, 'Roxana, Or the Drawing Room.' The narrator of this poem notes that "The Prince is *ogle'd*, some the King persue,/ But your Roxana only follows you" (1977, 185). It was these lines, Isobel Grundy argues, that "helped to make the poem politically suspect, for the breach between George I and his son was not yet open" (1977, 185).

²⁰ Holmes notes that "Day-to-day parliamentary tactics were often concerted by the London clubs of the leading Whigs. The Rose (or Rose Tavern) Club of William's reign, and the Kit Kat and Hanover Clubs of Anne's, were in line of descent from the Green Ribbon Club of the 1670s" (1993, 346). Although Montagu would not have had access to such clubs her creation of and exploitation of epistolary space between herself and London might have served as an analogue for such political activity.

²¹ If she is also the recipient of the letter dated 17th June 1717 (which is disputed) then Lady Rich is here more explicitly the butt of humour in the embassy letters. Montagu writes: "I heartily beg your Ladyship's pardon, but I really could not forbear laughing heartily at your Letter and the Commissions you are pleas'd to honour me with. You desire me to buy you a Greek slave ... The Greeks are subjects and not slaves ... Your whole Letter is full of mistakes from one end to 'tother" (367-8).

²² Langford notes that looking back on the course of religious controversies of the early eighteenth century "William Jones, a High Churchman of the reign of George III, observed that 'natural religion' had 'produced the deistical substitution of naked morality, or Turkish honesty, for the doctrines of intercession, redemption, and divine grace'" (1989, 241). This linking of the pejorative 'Turkish honesty' to 'naked morality' is particularly apposite in relation to Montagu's embassy letters.

CHAPTER FOUR. AN EPISTOLARY REDOUBT: THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE COUNTESSSES OF HERTFORD AND POMFRET (1738-1741)

If any answer comes to this plain letter—I shall know both that you are generous indeed, and that our small space is ours—for our short time—until the moment of impossibility makes itself known—

Your R. H. A.

from A. S. Byatt's Possession: A Romance (1991, 198)

The mid-eighteenth century correspondence between two retired courtiers of the reign of George II, Frances (Thynne) Seymour, Countess of Hertford (1699-1754), and Henrietta Louisa (Jeffreys) Fermor, Countess of Pomfret (*circa* 1702-1762), was first published in 1805. As George Paston notes, the publication “met with a success that would have delighted them had they been alive to witness it”; and indeed “For several years after the publication ... the two friends were held up to young people as models of virtue, culture, and refinement” (1901, 3 and 53). The explanation for this success undoubtedly lies in the letters’ nostalgic yet vivid depiction of the values of what John Cannon sees as an “aristocratic century” (1984, *passim*). This commonly held view of the eighteenth century has been summed up by Roy Porter in his description of:

Old-school literary historians [who] admired it as an age of wise traditionalism, of elegance and wit, or of Squire Western rumbustiousness; [and of] today’s ‘new tory’ historians [who] equally admire it as a stable church-and-kind order, with affinities to the *anciens régimes* of the Continent. The effect of such characterizations has been to portray Georgian England as a golden age ... (1990, 1)

So, the editor of the letters, William Bingley, notes of Hertford that “from the earliest part of her life she afforded an amiable example of virtues united with rank”; whilst Pomfret’s aristocratic qualities “very nearly resembled those of her amiable friend and correspondent” (1806, xiv and xxvi). Such an evocation in 1805, the year of Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar, would have been particularly resonant with certain sections of the reading public. For although by the 1800s “The challenge from

France ... was less ideological and more nationalist ... a problem remained—whether the aristocratic governments of the old order could overcome the new French meritocracy under Napoleonic leadership” (Cannon 1984, 165). By 1815, with Waterloo, even this problem seemed to have been solved. As Linda Colley notes, “A British army led by a Duke, and officered overwhelmingly by men of landed background who had purchased their commissions, helped destroy a self-made emperor and his legions” (1994, 191-2). It is, then, unsurprising that between 1805 and 1815 a body of letters extolling aristocratic values should have been popular amongst a section of the reading public that believed itself to have staked everything upon the superiority of those values over the meritocracy of Bonaparte’s France.

However, the popularity of the Countesses’ letters was short lived: Paston pointedly notes that she is engaged in the business of memorialising figures all of whom “were celebrated, or at least notorious, in their own day ... and all [of whom] have fallen, whether deservedly or not, into neglect, if not oblivion” (1901, v). Specifically in relation to the Countesses’ correspondence, Paston draws attention to the fact that:

At the time of its publication the editor, a Mr. Bingley, had not the opportunities which we enjoy of comparing his material with the numerous letters of Horace Walpole which have been printed since ... The Lady Pomfret of the correspondence is represented to us as a *grande dame* of the utmost refinement and culture, but the Lady Pomfret drawn for us by Walpole’s malicious pen is the most perfect specimen of a *précieuse ridicule* that her century has produced. (3-4)

Walpole certainly had infinite malice for a woman “who refines when she should laugh, and reasons when she should be diverted”; and who, having learned at the age of forty to play the flageolet, “at concerts, when she heard the flute, would set tooting, and staring; and whistling with her lips, playing with one hand on her swelled belly, and t’other in her breeches” (XVII: 477 and XIV: 248).¹ The latter invective is taken from Walpole’s ‘Anecdote of Lady Pomfret’, written in approximately 1740; in which he goes on to characterize Pomfret as “Sabina [who] was half witted, half learned, half ill-natured, half proud, half vulgar” (XIV: 247). This description represents the general tenor of Walpole’s comments on Pomfret:

disparagement of her learning. So, whilst in Florence and availing himself of Pomfret's hospitality, Walpole takes time out on 31st July 1740 to write to Richard West that:

On Wednesday we expect a third she-meteor. Those learned luminaries the Ladies P[omfret] and W[alpole] are to be joined by the Lady M[ary] W[ortley] M[ontagu]. You have not been witness to the rhapsody of mystic nonsense which these two fair ones debate incessantly, and consequently cannot figure what must be the issue of this triple alliance: we have some idea of it. Only figure the coalition of prudery, debauchery, sentiment, history, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and metaphysics; all, except the second, understood by halves, by quarters, or not at all. You shall have the journals of this notable academy. Adieu, my dear West! (XIII: 227-8)

Nor did Hertford escape Walpole's invective. In her later years, after the tragic death of her only son, Hertford became interested in religion and spiritualism. On hearing of her death in 1754 Walpole writes caustically that "The second Dowager of Somerset is gone to know whether all her letters from the living to the dead have been received" (XXXV: 179). The same sort of invective against the Countesses, particularly in relation to Pomfret, can be found across Walpole's correspondence; to the extent that in later letters to Horace Mann he refers to Pomfret as "Our old diversion the Countess" (XX: 579).

The result of the publication of Walpole's letters was that Hertford and Pomfret became an embarrassment: flaws in the shining gem of eighteenth century aristocratic values "based upon 1688 and exemplified in Burley, Bowood, Chatsworth and Kedleston" (Cannon 1984, ix). For example, W. H. Wilkins takes Walpole at his word and notes that "Lady Pomfret was considered by many of her contemporaries to be a prodigy of learning; she seems rather to have been a courtly Mrs. Malaprop" (1901, II: 70); and Paston remarks that Hertford possibly "belonged to the same genus ... for she ostentatiously patronized the poets" (1901, 4). But this is to assume that there was indeed a fixed set of aristocratic values in the eighteenth century; that Hertford and Pomfret deviated from it; and that Walpole exemplified it in his pained excoriations of the two abominable Countesses. In effect, both Paston and Wilkins uphold—even as they denigrate the Countesses—the myth of "Georgian

England ... as an Eden of ease, elegance, and equipoise" (Porter 1990, 98). And yet much recent research has gone towards disproving the existence in the eighteenth century of a stable and comfortable aristocratic polity with a single body of values; and towards revealing that "beneath the perfectly powdered wig, emotional and psychological disorder seethed" (98). This chapter argues that such seething takes place very noticeably in the letters of Hertford and Pomfret; and that it forces them at least temporarily to withdraw into an imaginary epistolary redoubt within the larger fortification of the landed aristocracy. Far from making the Countesses exceptional, I argue that this withdrawal makes them typical of their class in their age.

Robert Halsband describes Pomfret as "a pleasantly mediocre person, sympathetic and considerate" (1956, 172). If this judgement is correct, then what drove such a person to engage in the sorts of cultural exchanges that are to be found in her letters to Hertford?—and that when reflected in her life outside her letters left her so open to the potentially damaging ridicule of contemporaries such as Walpole, Mann, and West? Taking stock of the position of polite and educated women in the eighteenth century, Porter draws a distinction: "Frenchwomen presided over the salons of the *philosophes*: English ladies were encouraged to conserve their strength by indulging only in tea-table gossip and ornamental pastimes such as embroidery" (1990, 24). But the Countesses were much more than just polite or educated: they were aristocratic and felt themselves directly concerned in the propagation and maintenance of "aristocratic values and the assumption of aristocratic superiority [that] dominated everyday life" (Cannon 1984, 169). It is this which explains their willingness to engage in cultural exchange both within and without letters, for the "privileges to which upper-class women had access could do a very great deal to mitigate the disabilities conferred by gender, especially when class carried associations with both power and responsibility" (Laurence 1994, 14). Despite this, for the Countesses epistolary space is not the wide open veldt of opportunity traversed by Dorothy Osborne; nor the dangerous battleground upon which Sir George Etherege fought out a final rear-guard action in support of James II's brand of absolutism; nor the rallying ground of propaganda within which Lady Mary Wortley Montagu hoped to intervene in the Whig Schism on the side of Sir Robert Walpole

and Townshend. Rather, the Countesses always view the epistolary space that is imagined in their correspondence as a sanctuary within which to react to perceived pressures within and upon the 'Venetian oligarchy' that had opportunely coalesced itself around Walpole and the Whigs after the bursting of the South Sea Bubble: and that had throughout the 1720s and 1730s warmed itself upon the last dying embers of the fire of a rage of party that had largely burnt itself out in the earlier part of the century.² In this profound sense the Countesses are reactionaries rather than originals. Still, examination of their letters demonstrates the existence of imaginations of epistolary space—this time as a kind of defence work—towards the end of my period of study just as clearly as does that of the correspondences covered in chapters one to three.

Pressure within the 'Venetian oligarchy'

In January 1739 Hertford interrupted her retirement at St Leonard's Hill in Windsor Forest and made a visit to London. From there, she writes to Pomfret that:

the princess Amelia was on Banstead Downs during all the rain on Wednesday, engaged in a fox-chase. It is a happy thing to have so robust a constitution, as to receive no injury from such Amazonian entertainments; and, if the poor queen were not too late an instance of the contrary, I should begin to fancy that princesses were not of the same composition with their inferiors. (I: 75)³

Earlier on, she had reported dryly from Windsor that "our Forest rings with the gallantries of his royal highness the duke [of Cumberland]"; and that "the prince and princess are to set out for the Bath tomorrow. I conclude that their journey will produce a good deal both of expence and news" (I: 46). Hertford's distaste for the "Amazonian" behaviour of the princess and for the bumptiousness of Cumberland is a questioning of what is appropriate in royalty; and reveals her suspicion that the Hanoverian version is barely adequate. Such questionings and suspicions become acute for Hertford long before and in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Sir Robert Walpole in February 1742. Events leading up to this *dénouement*—which

Paul Langford describes as the work “of a factious aristocracy” (1989, 34)—are nervously traced in the letters to Pomfret. On 13th March 1739 Hertford notes that “this has been a very angry session of parliament; and, I own, the conduct of the patriots, in abandoning the houses, seems to me a frightful omen. I can hardly think they would do so much without designing to do more; and then, what may not the consequence be?” (I: 117). On 8th May 1740 she reveals that “the Duke of Argyle is turned out of all his employments, and ... my lord Hartford has got the regiment of the blueguards” (I: 263-4); and later on she describes to Pomfret the attack on Walpole in Parliament that had taken place on 13th February 1741 and in which he spoke “with dignity and eloquence which appeared like inspiration” (II: 252). Argyll was “arrogant, ambitious, and above all unpredictable”; and yet he could not be ignored for “as head of the Campbells he enjoyed huge influence in Scotland” (Langford 1989, 46). He had initially been turned against the ministry by Queen Caroline’s dealing, as Queen-Regent during the prolonged absence of George II in Hanover, with the 1736 Porteous Riots in Edinburgh. Van der Kiste notes that for Caroline this “proved an unusually trying Regency” (1997, 141). No doubt as a consequence it also proved trying for the Queen’s six Ladies of the Bedchamber: of whom Hertford and Pomfret comprised two. Such a trial cannot have done anything to endear the absentee Hanoverian King to the Countesses. When Walpole finally fell the Opposition recognised the importance of Argyll’s contribution—through his electioneering activities in Scotland against the Government—and sought to reward him. He demanded the immediate return of the Horse Guards Blue; and when his demands were met (with some reluctance on the King’s part), the subsequent conflict with Lord Hertford pitted his Countess directly against Princess Amelia.

Helen Hughes notes that “So fraught with significance did those days seem to Lady Hertford that she noted down the events in a fragmentary journal which she kept from January 1 to March 15, 1742” (1940, 182). The fact that Hertford despaired of the letter form at this point is indicative in itself. Did she fear that letters containing sensitive accounts of her husband’s manoeuvrings might be liable to interception? Certainly the possibility existed: for it was during the parliamentary session of 1742 that Joseph Bell lost his position as Comptroller of the Post Office

after “many years of political interference with the postal service” (Langford 1989, 186). And certainly access to Lord Hertford’s intentions would have had interest value enough to certain elements in the government. Lord Hertford resolutely rejected all attempts by Lord Carteret to persuade him to resign command of the Blue with a good grace—despite the offer of several lesser compensations. When he was forced to hand it over to Argyll, in pique, he resigned all his other employments (leaving his family in a perilous financial position as a result of his own father’s malice towards his wife’s family). At this point it seemed as if Argyll and his associates had achieved with little expense what they had so long desired in the toppling of Walpole: a broad bottom ministry comprising both Tories and Opposition Whigs. Moreover, Lord Hertford was one of the few obvious victims of this arrangement. No doubt in an attempt to placate the family, Hertford (as she notes in her journal) was summoned to St. James’s Palace by Princess Amelia. However, she did not take the summons in the spirit in which it was intended: “I was a little surprised at this, since she had never done me the honor to send to me but once before from the time of the Queen’s death” (quoted in Hughes 1940, 190-1). Hertford describes in her journal a very cool scene during which she goes a little too far and intimates that her son Lord Beauchamp will not remember the betrayal of his father kindly—and then has rapidly to backtrack when the Princess replies that she does not like this idea: “he has been bred up with so strict notions of his duty to his King, and so firm an attachment for the Royal Family, that he will never deviate from them” (192). At the termination of the scene Hertford repeatedly and frostily refuses to promise to treat the Princess with such intimacy as would allow her in future to call at St. James’s without invitation. But meanwhile events had taken a new direction. Argyll found himself and his cause betrayed by Carteret and Pulteney, under the aegis of the ‘New Whigs’, and again resigned all his offices, including command of the Blue. George II had in fact come to loathe the Tories and had been opposed all along to a broad bottom ministry. He immediately restored the Blue to Hertford who condescended to accept the return of all his other employments. In retrospect, as Langford notes, “the crisis of February 1742 was as important as any ... in preventing that great Country Party coalition which had been the hope of so many

Whigs and Tories throughout the period of Walpole's primacy" (1989, 187). The shifts in power that were the result of this crisis had been brewing for several years with Prince Frederick supplying much of the yeast to aid the process. In the end the net winner was Carteret—who took over from Walpole the direction of foreign policy. However, as Jeremy Black notes, he had none of Walpole's subtlety and he quickly "precipitated the '45, the greatest crisis that affected the eighteenth-century British state" (1984, 4). Pressures within the 'Venetian oligarchy' were thus real and had real consequences. True, "For all but a few relatively brief interludes between 1722 and 1760 most of the real political power and decision-making in Britain was concentrated in very few hands" (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 28). But those hands were often very unsteady. Moreover, the letters between Hertford and Pomfret were exchanged when this unsteadiness was particularly apparent: during what Geoffrey Holmes and Daniel Szechi refer to as "the tense years from 1738 to 1742" (24).

The tenseness of those years was felt particularly by Lord and Lady Pomfret. For upon the death of Queen Caroline in September 1737 both lost court positions and salaries. Lady Pomfret had been Caroline's Lady of the Bedchamber since 1720; and Lord Pomfret her Master of the Horse since 1727. The value of the latter appointment is demonstrated by the fact that it was "said to have [been] bought of Mrs. Clayton with a pair of diamond earrings worth £1400" (Paston 1901, 7).⁴ The result of the double loss for the Pomfrets was disastrous and:

On 22 May 1738 the 1st Earl of Egmont describes the Earl [of Pomfret]'s financial difficulties, and mentions that creditors had seized the Pomfrets' house and furniture in Hanover Square. He adds: "I am truly concerned for this Lord, who is a sober, virtuous, well-bred gentleman, and has a tincture of learning." Finally he states that the story has proved false. (Cokayne 1945, X: 573)

False or not in his details Egmont might have been: but Halsband sums up the case when he notes that Lord Pomfret was forced to leave Britain to travel on the continent "probably on account of his debts" (1966a, II: 118).⁵ This departure took place in July 1738, less than ten months after the death of Caroline, and precipitated the lengthy correspondence with Hertford. The Pomfrets could thus not but have

blamed their misfortunes on the vagaries of the Hanoverian monarchy. And for this reason it is a surprise that they did not more explicitly associate themselves after Caroline's death with the Opposition 'reversionary interest': as it was "In late summer 1737 [that] the Prince of Wales at last declared total war on his father, and on Walpole" (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 83). Perhaps it is just that Pomfret did not dare to be explicit. There are, however, some hints at least of her political feelings in the letters. Hertford must have felt that Pomfret would be interested in tales of aristocratic women who did explicitly voice political views—for she informs her friend of the result of a plan among a group of peers to hold a subscription ball at Heidegger's Rooms:

Monday was the first: and is likely to prove the last; for the day before, the duchess of Queensbury found it necessary to desire that my lord Conway would send word to sir Robert Walpole to keep away,—because, if he did not, neither she nor any of her friends would come. (II: 176)

Hertford is clearly less than enamoured of such an unnecessary action; but this was the least of which the duchess was capable. In a letter to Pomfret of March 1739 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu describes the duchess's assembling of a "tribe of dames" and the subsequent forcible storming of the House of Lords (II: 136-7).⁶ Once in the Lords this tribe voiced Opposition objections to the Convention of El P^{ar} do with Spain. Montagu concludes, "I look upon them to be the boldest assertors, and most resigned sufferers for liberty, I ever read of" (II: 137). That both Hertford and Montagu wrote to Pomfret of the duchess of Queensb^{er}ry's actions suggests that she might have expressed interest in—or empathy with—the troublesome character of that Lady.

The Opposition interest specifically attacked the corruption of the Walpolian 'court' in favour of the patriot 'country'. Prince Frederick himself waited until after Caroline's death to make his declaration of war on the court: perhaps because the sudden absence of the powerful Queen resulted in the creation of a virtual vacuum of power. As Van der Kiste notes, after 1727 "Queen Caroline effectively reigned and ruled, governing the kingdom with Walpole" (1997, 104). To many minds there was little doubt as to who was the junior in this partnership: with Walpole felt to have

“virtually owed his pre-eminence in government to [Caroline]” (164). As Ladies of the Bedchamber Hertford and Pomfret would have been peculiarly aware of the anomalies created by an often absent and always indifferent King and a ruling Queen possessed, according to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu at least, of a “low cunning” (quoted in Van der Kiste 1997, 104). With Caroline gone the Countesses must have guessed that the situation would be likely to deteriorate. There are hints in her letters that in reaction to this perceived threat Pomfret, at least, went even further in her politics than even the patriot Opposition were prepared to go. Lord Pomfret had always been known as a Tory in the days before he was made an Earl (as indeed was Lord Hertford, who sat as a Tory member of parliament between 1705 and 1722). But it is still a surprise to read Pomfret’s description of a party in Rome, in 1741, at which she observed “a tall, fair young man” she describes as “il Principe” (II: 293). The man was in fact the Young Pretender himself, Prince Charles Edward; a meeting that took place only a few years before the Jacobite invasion of 1745. And indeed later on during her stay in Rome Pomfret describes a coach journey to the Corso: “in driving through which we saw the Pretender and his youngest son pass by in their coaches. I have now seen the whole family ...” (II: 293). Pomfret also describes meeting in that city “lady Nithsdale, who managed so cleverly in getting her lord out of the Tower the night before he was to have been beheaded” (II: 313). The reason that Lord Nithsdale was to have been beheaded was his treasonous involvement in the Jacobite rebellion of 1715. Why exactly were the Pomfrets so happy openly to mix with Jacobites in Rome? The answer remains obscure but it certainly does not point to a comfortable relationship with the Hanoverian court.

Even during the regnancy of Queen Caroline the Countesses were critical of the court. For by this time the “brilliant season” conducted by Prince George and Princess Caroline at Hampton Court in July 1716, when “Whigs and Tories [had been] treated graciously alike”, was long forgotten and “contemporaries regarded the court as hardly more lively than in the previous reign” (Van der Kiste 1997, 58 and 107). In a letter to Mrs Clayton of 7th August 1731, written from Hampton Court where she was in-waiting, Pomfret dryly notes that: “whether the Court is too perfect to admit of improvement, or more fixed than to suffer any change I don’t know: all

things appear to move in the same manner as usual: & all our actions are as mechanical as the Clock that directs 'em" (f. 172).⁷ Pomfret, who had joined the court soon after her marriage in 1720, quickly became "a friend and *protégée* of Mrs Clayton's" (Paston 1901, 6). She does not seem to have become very intimate with Hertford at the time, perhaps as a matter of policy. For real power in the Bedchamber lay only with Mrs Howard and Mrs Clayton, respectively the favourites of the King and the Queen, "who hated one another thoroughly" (Wilkins 1901, II: 71). Pomfret wrote many letters to Mrs Clayton at the time on the subject of court etiquette; in one of which, dated 21st August 1735, and after some general comments upon her recent recall to London, she writes:

thus, dear Lady Sundon, you see I am plunged as deep in chit-chat as if I had not been out of it: & tis but like a Delightful Dream; that calmness, that freedom of Thought, of Look, & Action; enjoy'd at Home: & improved at Sundon—but here tis otherwise, and our first Parents, at their leaving Paradise, could not find it more necessary to hide part of their Bodies than, we at Court do, to hide part of our Minds. (f. 179)

In this letter the restriction and worthless "chit-chat" of the court is specifically contrasted with the liberty and taste of the aristocratic "Home." This contrast would have been highlighted on a daily basis by comparison between the ramshackle St. James's Palace and the fact that "in the forty years after the peace of 1697 literally scores of temples were raised all over England ... to the aristocratic ideals ... which Chatsworth and its owner epitomized" (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 202). The tenor of Pomfret's comments in her letter to Mrs Clayton is perhaps unfair on the attempts made by Caroline to improve on the notoriously staid court of George I and his various mistresses. Van der Kiste notes that Caroline, "when not reading or engaged in conversation with the great minds of the day ... oversaw improvements and the planting of new trees in Hyde Park and the gardens at Kensington, St. James's and Richmond" (1997, 81). However, after Caroline's death all such attempts came to a premature end, to be replaced only by George II's developing "obsession with regularity and punctuality" (80). By the time of the correspondence between Hertford and Pomfret, open contempt of the weak court was common, particularly in

their own circle. For example Montagu writes to Pomfret on 17th May 1740 that: "I have an insuperable aversion to courts, or the shadows of them" (II: 187-8).

The epistolary space imagined in the letters between Hertford and Pomfret, then, very quickly comes to resemble a redoubt built somewhere inside the larger fortification of the aristocracy: an asylum from what Pomfret, in verse, describes as "that dull, designing, whirligig, a court" (II: 144). At the beginning of the correspondence the sense of relief achieved in this retreat is palpable. Pomfret at once emphasises the absence of the influence of the court, reminding Hertford that: "there is now, dear madam, no reason to dissemble" (I: 56); as Hertford reminds Pomfret that there is now no longer occasion for the saying of any of the "great many ... unmeaning civil things which both you and I have often heard [at court]" (I: 51). The paradox inherent in this state of affairs is quickly spotted by Pomfret for: "now, though parted, we may in peace communicate our thoughts" (I: 70). The gap between the Countesses which makes this frankness possible is visualized by means of imaginations of the progress of letters through epistolary space. So, Pomfret begins one letter with an image of a letter suspended in space and soliciting its own delivery: "this humbly knocks at your dressing-room door, to welcome you to town, and to tell you that I am impatient to be informed that you got no cold at the birthday" (I: 47); and Hertford replies with an image of the preferential hospitality accorded to Pomfret's letters as they are delivered: "your letters will always be welcome to my dressing-room, and should never stay long enough to knock at the door, if I knew but of their coming" (I: 51). Later on in the correspondence Pomfret imagines letters deep into epistolary space, perhaps midway between sending and receiving: "I begin to be ashamed of my persecuting you with my stupid epistles; and I believe that Fate interposes in your favour, and turns aside the flying bits of paper" (II: 210). These are all very abstract images that eliminate the actual mechanics of delivery. In a later part of this chapter I will examine how those mechanics impinged on the Countesses' imaginations; and thereby caused the redoubling of the defences of the redoubt. In the meantime it is worth remembering at this point Janet Gurkin Altman's dictum that "epistolary language, which is the language of absence, makes present by make-believe" (1982, 140). Bruce Redford expands upon this idea as

follows: the “letter-writer is an actor, but a *magician*-actor who works on his audience by sustaining the illusion of physical presence” (1986, 7). The Countesses do indeed sometimes make-believe that they are present to each other: always in the aristocratic home and far removed from the world of the court. For example, having received a letter in which Hertford writes that she wishes she could transport herself into the presence of her friend Pomfret replies: “since you have so kind a wish for me, dear madam, as that of coming to my dressing room, I will indulge the agreeable thought that it is effected; and, though I scarcely know how, will believe you here” (I: 36). To which Hertford replies: “I cannot help being in haste to place myself again by your fire-side” (I: 43). But the Countesses do not sustain these images as Redford implies: they are always aware that they are only able to say what they are saying because they are in fact not present to each other: because there is a space between them through which their letters are able to travel. Pomfret makes this clear in one of her verse epistles: “And since from absence I this good receive,/ Can I with reason even absence grieve?” (II: 145). It is this epistolary space which provides the opportunity to imagine an aristocratic redoubt—in response to pressures within the Venetian oligarchy of which the Countesses themselves were acutely aware.

In the sanctuary of epistolary space the Countesses are able to foster aristocratic values; a process which gradually takes place across the many letters of the correspondence in the same way that thousands of moving pictures allow for the eventual production of a single coherent film. It is a process enabled by the aristocratic ideal of friendship: impossible at court, where “constancy’s a sport” (II: 144). So, as if exchanging binding contracts Pomfret encloses two sets of verses with one letter and notes that “what Mr Dryden makes Almanzor say of lovers, may not be improperly applied to friends” (I: 187-8); and Hertford notes that “I will send you a little Essay on Friendship, which was given me some years ago by a person who is since dead” (I: 317). According to these terms the Countesses begin to fortify their redoubt.

There are several different ways in which they go about this process of fortification. For example, the Countesses assert their own right as aristocrats to active participation in the republic of letters. Hertford in particular was aided in this

venture by Lord Hertford's purchase, in 1739, of the Tory grandee Lord Bathurst's estate of Richkings Park. Inspecting the grounds upon arrival, Hertford informs Pomfret that she is particularly delighted with:

an old covered bench with many remains of the wit of my lord Bathurst's visitors, who inscribed verses upon it. Here is the writing of Addison, Pope, Prior, Congreve, Gay, and (what he esteemed no less) of several fine ladies. I cannot say that the verses answered my expectations from such authors; we have, however, all resolved to follow the fashion, and to add some of our own to the collection. (I: 272)

Hertford does several things here: she notes Bathurst's encouragement of the literary leanings of women, she asserts her own ability to judge the writings of all the premier poets of her day, and she makes no bones about placing her own verses in the company of those poets (if in a somewhat private realm). However, there is little doubt that the Countesses were sensitive about the effects of their gender on their ability to assert aristocratic values. This is hardly surprising as: "For much of the period [1500-1760] it was believed that the purpose of educating women was [only] to prepare them for marriage" (Laurence 1994, 165). In the face of this prejudice the Countesses are eager to discuss examples of learned women. In particular Hertford singles out Elizabeth Carter, who made money writing for the *Gentleman's Magazine* during the 1730s:

I have been agreeably amused ... by reading signior Algarotti's *Newtonianismo per le Dame*; translated into English from the Italian, in a very good style, by a young woman not more than twenty years old. I am well informed that she is an admirable Greek and Latin scholar, and writes both those languages, as well as French and Italian, with great elegance. But, what adds to the wonder she excites, is, that all this learning has not made her the less reasonable woman, the less dutiful daughter, or the less agreeable and faithful friend. (I: 122-3)

Although impressed by Carter, Hertford is still anxious to answer the charge that too much education had deleterious effects upon a woman. Delighted at news of this find Pomfret replies with her own discovery of "another female, of about four-and-twenty, of mean birth, but of such superior knowledge and capacity, that she has been

elected the philosophy-professor at Bologna, where she now gives lectures as such" (I: 136). Encouraged by these examples the Countesses discuss a wide variety of literature throughout their letters: remaining far from impressed with works from *Gulliver's Travels* to Pope's verses. They do not always agree. For example of a new play by James Thomson, Pomfret writes that "Edward and Eleonora tires and provokes me ... by its stupidity" (I: 209); even though Hertford had previously noted of the same play that "I hear it is the fashion to decry it extremely; but, I own, I am ungenteel enough to prefer it infinitely to Agamemnon [another of Thomson's plays]" (I: 126). Hertford has many other pet hates, including that of the writings of Rochefoucauld^d and of Montaigne: "another author whom I cannot sincerely admire; and I never see a volume of his works lie on the table of a person whom I wish to be my friend, without concern" (II: 91). Nor is Hertford impressed with some of the more cynical verses of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Having listened to her friend's reasons for this aversion and to her recommendation that Montagu indulge herself in a perusal of the New Testament, Pomfret replies: "how agreeable and just are your reflexions upon the verses I sent you! What pity and terror does it create, to see wit, beauty, nobility, and riches, after a full possession of fifty years, talk that language,—and talk it so feelingly, that all who read must know that it comes from the heart!" (II: 111). Such frequent encomiums bestowed upon each other were clearly designed to encourage the Countesses into the mutual belief that their correspondence represented an excellent example of the aristocratic ideal of "informed, entertaining exchange carried on between persons belonging to a circle of familiar acquaintances, who shared a common knowledge of literature, history, and ... social institutions" (Anderson and Ehrenpreis 1966, 274). None of this, however, was by any means a neutral activity—for as Vivien Jones notes "Arguments about whether, and how, women should be educated are always part of wider political debates" (1990, 98). Here the debate was about the natural right of the aristocracy to the power, the riches, and the responsibility that they held from both the King and the 'common' people.

Concerns with literature and with the education of women were not the only ways in which the Countesses went about the fortification of their redoubt. Cannon notes of the eighteenth century aristocracy that:

Classicism shaped the context of their lives intellectually and physically. They adorned their houses with pilasters and porticoes, they filled their rooms with urns and busts and their gardens with temples, statues and satyrs. Their minds were stocked with classical images and examples. (1984, 34)

And so as she travels across Italy Pomfret sends Hertford elaborate descriptions of such classically inspired Renaissance buildings and structures as the cathedral at Siena a “which is one of the finest I ever saw ... a mixture of Gothic and Roman architecture” (I: 143); the Duomo and Santa Croce in Florence, whose “architecture is esteemed both just and noble” (II: 2); “the church of St. Lorenzo” (II: 173), and the Rialto bridge in Venice (III: 153). Paston speaks of Pomfret’s letters disparagingly as a “condensed guide-book” (1901, 13). But to my mind Pomfret was consciously and strategically asserting the superiority of aristocratic taste here; and moreover the assertion has meaning when taken in the context of an aristocracy that felt itself under pressure from within. In Florence, then, Pomfret describes at great length the home of an:

old marchese of this place ... He is called Cosimo Riccardi, and is one of the richest men in this country. He is the owner of an extremely fine palace ... full of the best pictures, statues, and furniture, that are to be seen in Florence; and containing a noble collection of books, medals, intaglioos, cameos, and so vast a quantity of plate ... that it appears rather the treasure of a sovereign prince than that of a private person. (I: 278-9)

There is no question but that Pomfret feels that lists of such objects are the appropriate content of a letter to a fellow aristocrat such as Hertford. She is conscious, however, that lists do not make for the most interesting of letters. In Rome, she notes that “I forbear mentioning porphyry pillars, fountains, &c. for Rome is so full of them, that, if I should take notice of all its treasures of that sort, I should fill my letters with nothing else” (II: 301); and more specifically of the great duke’s gallery in Florence “I cannot pretend to describe every statue here, so, to avoid misplaced praise, I will name none in particular” (II: 32). There is almost the sense here that Pomfret, in failing to elaborate, is apologetic because she knows that she is shirking her real responsibilities in her letters to Hertford. In turn, Hertford thanks her friend for elaborating on “all the magnificence of Italy”; and notes that “I am

grown ambitious all at once: and want to change my *bergerie* for a palace; and to ransack all the cabinets in Europe for paintings, sculptures, and other curiosities, to place with them" (II: 72). Such hints are not missed and in another letter Pomfret goes some way to satisfying this craving by means of the following offer: "I can supply you from hence with alabaster vases, small brass statues, or marble and paste tables extremely fine and beautiful" (I: 212-3). For the countesses, then, the knowledge of and the collection of such classically inspired objects means the cementing of a visible right to power.

This was common behaviour, as: "Italy's peculiar combination of inherited glory and political feebleness made it highly suitable for a form of colonization [and] ... overwhelmingly the favourite market-place for works of art and 'antiquities'" (Langford 1989, 312-3). But as Anne Laurence notes "any pretensions women might have had were mocked rather than encouraged. Few women collectors were taken seriously" (1994, 160). Few can have been taken less seriously than was Pomfret by Horace Walpole. In 1755 Pomfret presented part of the Arundel marbles (a collection of statuary which had belonged to her husband's father) to the University of Oxford. On 24th July 1756 Walpole provides Sir Horace Mann with an account of the donation:

she has been there at the public act to receive adoration ... she sat three days together for four hours at a time to hear verses and speeches, to hear herself called Minerva, nay the public orator had prepared an encomium on her beauty, but being struck with her appearance, had enough presence of mind to whisk his compliments to the beauties of her mind. Do but figure her; her dress had all the tawdry poverty and frippery, with which you remember her ... 'Tis amazing that she did not mash a few words of Latin, as she used to fricassee French and Italian! (XX: 579)

Perhaps Walpole had his own axe to grind: for Langford points out that his father Sir Robert was "the only Hanoverian Prime Minister before Addington in 1801 who did not inherit blue blood from either his father or mother" (1989, 34). Yet in the face of his mockery it is only right to question Pomfret's wisdom in continuing openly to subscribe to—and in letters to foster—the aristocratic veneration for the classical

world that is demonstrated by the lengths she went to in her efforts to reassemble and then to donate to Oxford University the Arundel marbles.⁸

Cannon perhaps has the answer to this question in his emphasis on the fact that “a pervasive code of values” was thought essential for the production of “a conviction of the rightness of patrician rule” (1984, 34). This was particularly important in an England which, as Porter points out, was exceptional in terms of European aristocracy in that “the absolute ascendancy of the landed nobility was something newly re-established” (1990, 54). Mark Thomson makes much of the paradox in the eighteenth century of the “continuing domination of the aristocracy and the simultaneous insignificance of the House of Lords” (quoted in Cannon 1984, 93). And yet Cannon adequately demonstrates the vast increase in control of the Lords over the Commons during the eighteenth century, by means of patronage and manipulation of the electoral system. In effect, the Lords gradually became “firemen in a town without fires and, consequently, they could allow their hoses to rot” (125). The rise of the Commons was not, then, widely perceived to be the source of any pressure within the Venetian oligarchy. The monarchy on the other hand was a different matter: and fear of a return to absolutist tendencies among the Hanoverians—and indeed even of the remote prospect of a violently restored Stuart monarchy—was widespread among the aristocracy. This was especially so at times of political tension such as the gradual loosening of Walpole’s grip on power between 1738 and 1742, and on the accession of George III (as discussed in chapter three). Porter draws attention to the fact that “the solidarity of propertied interests in rejecting James II heralded greater cohesion to come” (1990, 55). However, without the benefit of hindsight the identification of such a trend would have been impossible to those aristocrats attempting to hold on to power at the time; and thus would have provided scant comfort. The various means by which Cannon sees the eighteenth century aristocracy attempting to tighten their grip on power—in controlling access to education, in a tendency towards endogamous marriage, and in the amassing of economic and political power—all point to his conclusion that: “The comparison of liberal and responsible English noblemen with haughty and exclusive continentals

[now] looks facile" (1984, 9). Such a tightening of the grip is clear evidence of pressure somewhere within the much celebrated Revolution Settlement.

This Settlement—by which the power of the monarchy was curbed to the advantage of the aristocracy—was strictly based upon the Protestant succession to the throne. As Cannon notes: "That coolness of tone and mistrust of enthusiasm ... so characteristic of Hanoverian upper-class Christianity, proved to be a very appealing point of consensus and helped to bind the religious wounds of the past" (1984, 59-60). Thus Pomfret manages to sustain her cynicism about the practices of the continental Christians throughout her travels around Europe. Just outside Florence she hears that workmen, excavating the foundations for a new church, had long ago found in the earth "the image of the Virgin Mary in *terra cotta*" (II: 153). She tells Hertford with incredulity that: "upon all general calamities ever since, [the Virgin of the Imprunetta] is conducted with great pomp into the city of Florence, and remains in the Duomo till, upon frequent prayers and remonstrances, she is so good as to remove or remedy the evil" (II: 154). Again, in Lucca, Pomfret is told by a knight of Malta the story of another icon called the *Volto Santo*: "a great sculptor having designed a crucifix, and not being able to perform it to his mind, went to bed very much discontented; and on the next morning this was brought to him by angels, ready-made from heaven" (II: 156). At the end of her letter Pomfret decides, "You have now had enough of wonders; but surely it is the greatest, that rational creatures can thus divest themselves of reason" (II: 157). Hertford replies with equal incredulity that the Catholics of Florence and Lucca could go on "believing that an old tile can cast out devils, or that the angels amuse themselves in carving out crucifixes to get money for the priests" (II: 188). By means of this sustained anti-Catholicism the Countesses celebrated with confidence the rightness of the Protestant aristocracy of which they were a part; and the pity of the fact that "those lands which Quintus Cincinnatus, and other patricians of Rome, did not disdain to cultivate with their own hands, should now have become the property of a set of lazy priests and monks" (I: 250-1).

The eighteenth century aristocracy sought always to affirm its values as a means of distancing itself from "Family life at court [which] came to resemble a bear

garden rather than the happy domesticity celebrated by court poets" (Langford 1989, 12). It is not then surprising that Pomfret shows such interest in the epistolary network that the old Marchese Riccardi in Florence has set up: "the object of his constant attention is news of every kind ... He has correspondents in all parts of Europe, in order to be informed who keeps dinners or balls, who are invited, what the dishes are, how every person is drest, and such other important matters" (I: 279). This network can be seen as a figure for Pomfret and Hertford's correspondence: a barometer giving out readings of aristocratic goings on throughout the various political climates of Europe. At times the barometer registered alarmingly high readings of aristocratic atmospheric pressure. So, Cannon notes, "that aristocracy meant the rule of the best was a message assiduously expounded in eighteenth-century England ... The upper classes, consequently, were sensitive about the effect of disgraceful actions by their members" (1984, 171). Pomfret and Hertford, entrenched in their epistolary redoubt, were particularly sensitive about such effects. For example, Pomfret notes that: "most of our travelling youth neither improve themselves, nor credit their country" (I: 275). And Hertford comments on the nature of the assemblies making up the London season of 1741: "it is actually a ridiculous, though I think a mortifying sight, that play should become the business of the nation, from the age of fifteen to fourscore"; and in particular on one night in which "the Duke of Marlborough lost 700 pounds" (III: 14 and I: 75). Worse still were instances of either one of (what were perceived as) those twin and terrible banes of the English aristocracy: madness and suicide. So, in 1740 Hertford reports in duly sombre tones the circumstances of the death of Lord Scarborough: "his valet-de-chambre ... found him dead on the floor, with a pistol discharged in at his mouth. The balls were lodged in his brain, and had not penetrated his skull" (I: 215); as she had done in 1739 the fact that a brother of Lady Anne Frankland "became insane a little before she was married, and still remains so" (I: 140). However, most alarming for Pomfret at least in terms of space accorded to the subject—an alarm no doubt communicated to Hertford either explicitly or implicitly—would have been the London gossip sent to her by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. On 15th February 1741 Montagu reports to Pomfret that "the news I have from London is, Lady Margaret Hastings having

disposed of herself to a poor wandering methodist; Lady Lucy Manners being engaged to Mr Pawlet; Miss Henshaw married to Captain Strickland; and Lady Carnarvon receiving the honourable addresses of Sir Thomas Robinson"; which Montagu sums up as "a great heap of our sex's folly" (II: 225). Again, and only soon after Pomfret's departure from London, in November 1738, Montagu writes to Pomfret that:

Lady Harriet Herbert [has] furnished the tea-tables here with fresh tattle ... I was one of the first informed of her adventure by Lady Gage, who was told that morning by a priest, that she had desired him to marry her the next day to Beard, who sings in the farces at Drury Lane. He refused her that good office, and immediately told Lady Gage ... I told her honestly, that since the lady was capable of such amours, I did not doubt if this was broke off she would bestow her person and fortune on some hackney-coachman or chairman; and that I really saw no method of saving *her* from ruin, and her *family* from dishonour, but by poisoning her; and offered to be at the expense of the arsenic, and even to administer it with my own hands ... (II: 127)

Montagu is outrageous here; but as there is no evidence of a similar humour in the Countesses' letters it is more than likely that she communicated only alarm to Pomfret. Cannon notes that "Marriage gossip was the staple fare of many eighteenth-century correspondences"; and quotes Dr P. C. Otto's argument "that *mésalliances*, though giving vast pleasure to letter-writers and commentators, were rare" (1984, 73 and 91). Hertford and Pomfret certainly indulged in their fair share of marriage gossip,⁹ but *mésalliances* seem to have given them no pleasure at all—rather they contributed to anxiety over the present state of the aristocracy.

An objection to the argument of this chapter might be that even aristocratic women such as Hertford and Pomfret would have had little inducement to foster the values of their class in an age in which there is "little sign of women taking any initiative in broader political issues" (Laurence 1994, 6). After all, how much of a stake would women have felt in a political nation within which "in many important ways the lives of the richest and most privileged women ... more closely resembled those of the poorest and least privileged women than they resembled the lives of men" (16)? However, several qualifications need to be made to Laurence's argument. First, she is dealing with an enormous period from 1500 to 1760 and, as

she concedes, by the second half of the eighteenth century things had begun to change. Second, Hertford and Pomfret were perhaps in a unique position. As Ladies of the Bedchamber to Caroline—often between 1727 and 1737 as good as a reigning Queen—they would have been very well acquainted with the machinery of political power and with the various mechanical hitches and breakdowns it was subject to; as well as with the satisfaction to be gained from the periods when the machinery was running smoothly. Laurence gives the example of another of Caroline's Ladies of the Bedchamber, Henrietta Howard, Countess of Suffolk, who "was much courted by those who thought she would prevail in the king's counsels" (249). And indeed in his *Memoirs* Lord Hervey reports Sir Robert Walpole's frustration at this state of affairs: "he added that it was those bitches Lady Pomfret and Lady Sundon, who were always ... making their court ... who made it so difficult to bring the Queen to do what was right and sensible for her to do" (quoted in Sedgwick 1963, 136). Third, as a means of countering the way in which women have traditionally been hidden from history as a result of their past exclusion from exercising power in public Laurence notes that: "The public/ private dichotomy is invoked in studies of women both in the past and in the present. But a number of historians have suggested that this is not an appropriate device for looking at pre-industrial England" (1994, 8). Such a dichotomy, she adds, makes no sense in the face of "the organisation of the economy and family based on the household" (10).

This was even more true in the case of the specifically aristocratic household, where it was made virtually impossible to stay out of what is traditionally understood as the public arena. So, Hertford writes to Pomfret that: "it has long been my fixed opinion, that, in the latter part of life, when the duty owing to a family no longer calls upon us to act on the public stage of life, it is not only more decent, but infinitely more eligible, to live in an absolute retirement" (III: 279). Hertford thus affirms the necessity, earlier on in life, of an aristocratic woman's acting on the public stage. Such a role fell to Pomfret during her three years of travels on the continent, and after she returned to England, in her attempts to find a suitable husband for her eldest daughter in order to repair the seriously damaged family fortunes. Lady Sophia Fermor is described by Paston as "clever, cold-hearted, and ambitious" (1901, 45).

Pomfret first aimed at a son of the duke of Newcastle, alone and wandering in Italy; but he “took fright at the net that seemed to be laid for him” (41-2). Next Pomfret looked towards the elderly but powerful Lord Carteret and was this time successful; although the engagement “caused a great sensation in society, partly on account of the bridegroom’s high position, and partly on account of the difference in age between the pair” (44). On 22nd March 1744 Horace Walpole writes to Mann:

Who do you think is going to marry Lady Sophia Fermor?—only my Lord Carteret. This very week! A drawing-room conquest. Do but imagine how many passions will be gratified in that family! Her own ambition, vanity and resentment—Love she never had any. The politics, management, and pedantry of the mother, who will think to govern her son-in-law out of Froissard. (XVIII: 424)

Pomfret evidently achieved this marriage in the face of opposition. And when Carteret fell from power only weeks after his wedding the malicious talk was that “his wife and her mother ... are said to have felt bitter mortification at the failure of all their ambitions”(Paston 1901, 46). It was thus extremely important for an aristocratic woman to cultivate class values—as Hertford and Pomfret attempt to do in their letters—in order not to open herself to the ridicule of other aristocrats on the occasions when public appearances were necessary, and so to damage her family’s prospects of further advancement.

Hertford was much more concerned to stay out of the limelight and to avoid ridicule than Pomfret. But it is significant that this concern led her to become far more involved in the patronage of literary writers than Pomfret was: a practice which developed out of her habit, noted by Samuel Johnson, of inviting “every Summer some poet into the country, to hear her verses, and assist her studies” (quoted in Napier 1890, III: 225-6). Richard Holmes casts doubt on another of Johnson’s stories that Hertford intervened with Queen Caroline in 1728 in order to save the poet Richard Savage from being executed for murder: “from Aaron Hill, who had organised the whole appeal, we know that the key figure was really Lord Tyrconnel. For obvious reasons, Savage preferred to boast of the distinguished and literary Lady Hertford” (1994, 130).¹⁰ And yet beyond this there is no reason to doubt Hertford’s

status as “the fostering patroness of [James] Thomson, and ... high in the esteem of [Isaac] Watts and [William] Shenstone” (Cokayne 1953, XII: 81). Indeed, James Sambrook, Thomson’s biographer, notes that “Lady Hertford ... proved to be his most valuable woman patron” (1991, 61). The image that Hertford liked to project of herself is to be found in the irony which she detects (in a verse epistle to Pomfret) in her inheritance of Lord Bathurst’s estate at Richkings Park—which he “had arranged as a retreat for statesmen, poets, and the beauties of the Court” (Paston 1901, 30). Hertford writes:

For such he formed the well-contriv’d design;
Nor knew that Fate (perverse) had mark’d it mine.
Amazing turn!—could human eyes foresee
That Bathurst planted, schem’d, and built, for me?
[...]
To shelter me in my declining hours!
[...]
For me! whom Nature soberly design’d
With nothing striking in my face or mind;
Just fitted for a plain domestic life,—
A tender parent, and contented wife.
(II: 260)

The irony that Hertford does not see is that her self-conscious lack of pretension should need to be celebrated in ornamental verse by some of the most well-known poets of her day, as well as in her own verse. Thomson’s manuscript ‘To Retirement, an Ode’ contains the lines: “Come calm Retirement! Sylvan Power!// That on St. Leonard’s lov’st to Walk,/ To lead along the thoughtful Hour/ And with the gentle Hertford talk” (quoted in Hughes 1940, vi). His ‘Spring’, dedicated to the Countess, celebrates Hertford’s ability to “walk the plain/ With innocence and meditation joined/ In soft assemblage”; and in his ‘Hymn on Solitude’ his Muse assumes: “The gentle looking Harford’s bloom” (quoted in Logie Robertson 1908, 3-4 and 430). Thomson was a Scot who had come south to make his fortune. Summing up the course of his career J. A. Downie notes that “It would not be stretching the facts to interpret Thomson’s conduct as mercenary; he turned away from the court after failing to secure patronage, and proceeded to attack it instead” (1984, 182). At the

time of writing, then (1728), 'Spring' would have been giving Hertford just exactly what she wanted to hear. Paston too notes that "Both Shenstone [the poet] and Dr. Watts [the hymn-writer] dedicated poems to Lady Hertford, who was also the patroness of minor poets of her own sex, such as Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Mrs. Rowe" (1901, 5). And in a letter to Pomfret of 20th June 1741 from Richkings Park Hertford gives the distinct impression that another celebrated court poet of the time is entirely at her beck and call: "Stephen Duck (who is here at present) begs leave, with his humble duty, to offer you the enclosed ode, which I think is as pretty a thing as any thing I have seen of his" (III: 253). There seems little doubt that Hertford was all too aware that she had a public image and that she wished through Thomson and others to manipulate it to her own ends: to have the perception of herself put about as a cultured, rural aristocrat by nature as well as by birth. In this respect she was far more successful than Pomfret—attracting far less attention from the malice of Horace Walpole. Hertford did not take for granted but attempted to ensure that she "was known to her time for her benevolence and her modesty" (Hughes 1940, 428).

However, even Hertford upon venturing out of the imaginary redoubt of her correspondence with Pomfret risked the impugning of her aristocratic credentials. First, Johnson tells the story that in his visits to Lady Hertford in the country Thomson "took more delight in carousing with lord Hertford and his friends than assisting her ladyship's poetical operations, and therefore never received another summons" (quoted in Napier 1890, III: 226).¹¹ Hertford reveals her pique at this neglect in a letter to Pomfret of September 1742:

I have not seen Thomson almost these three years. He keeps company with scarce any one but Hallett and one or two players, and indeed hardly anybody else will keep company with him. He turns day into night, and night into day, and is (I am told) never awake till after midnight, and I doubt has quite drowned his genius. (quoted in Paston 1901, 49-50)¹²

Despite this, the story that Thomson preferred to get drunk with the gouty Lord Hertford than to discuss literature with his Lady would have done nothing for the reputation of the Countess as an exemplar of aristocratic values. Second—and more

serious still—is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s report, in a letter of 8th November 1758 to her daughter Lady Bute, that:

some few months before Lord W. Hamilton marry’d there appear’d a foolish Song said to be wrote by a Poetical Great Lady who I really think was the Character of Lady Arabella in the Female Quixote (without the Beauty). You may imagine such a conduct at Court made her superlatively ridiculous. (III: 187)

Halsband explains that the incident occurred in January 1733; and that Hamilton “was embarrassed to receive from the matronly Countess of Hertford a song coyly asking him to judge by her blushes and glances how much her heart was tormented for love of him” (1956, 145). At this point Hertford clearly needed a good critic like Thomson on her side, to read her Song before she sent it. All the more so because Hamilton had Montagu on his side, who quickly and mischievously agreed to write a reply to Hertford in which she made fun of the Countess. The reply itself came back to haunt Montagu, for her letter to her daughter in 1758 was precipitated by the eventual unauthorised publication of the work, embarrassing her in her turn. At all events it is not difficult to understand why Hertford should have retreated into the redoubt of her correspondence with Pomfret by 1738. Specific pressures within the Venetian oligarchy combined with personal embarrassment at the hands of Montagu, Horace Walpole, and Thomson had all finally taken their toll. The case was not very different with Pomfret—also happy to seek at least temporary cover.

Pressure upon the ‘Venetian oligarchy’

Langford notes that the changes highlighted in his study of the period between 1727 and 1783 had much to do with “the enrichment and influence of a broad middle class whose concerns became ever more central to Georgian society and whose priorities determined so much both of debate and action” (1989, xi). Such enrichment and influence cannot but have been felt as a threat by the aristocracy. The rise of the middle class was slow of course. But it was by no means a rise at a uniform rate across the decades and was instead punctuated by sudden rises and sudden dips in

visibility and influence. One such dramatic rise occurred as Hertford and Pomfret were writing their letters. For as H. T. Dickinson notes, “between 1739 and 1742, the urban bourgeoisie were convinced that the government’s actions threatened their economic interests [and so] ... displayed a capacity for concerted action that created serious political crises for Walpole’s administration” (1984, 47). During this period there occurred the Anglo-Spanish crisis of 1738, which developed in 1739 into the War of Jenkins’ Ear, which in turn led in 1740 to the War of the Austrian Succession. The war of 1739 was principally a war about trade that Walpole had hoped to avoid at all costs; it was precipitated against his will by “minority vested interests and ill-informed popular prejudice” (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 74).

The effect of the actions of middle class sugar barons and other traders in Spanish America and their financiers in stirring up the passions of London were felt by Hertford in person. On 24th October 1739 she nervously reports her sight of “the crowd which were drawn together yesterday to see the ceremony of proclaiming war with Spain” (I: 186); and on 27th May 1741 she writes to Pomfret describing at length the reaction of Londoners to the news of the British reverse at the battle of Cartagena (at which Pomfret’s second son had been present):

yet, to prove that the English mob never can be so thoroughly pleased as not to have a delight in doing mischief, they assembled in vast bodies, and demolished every window in London, where there were not lights, for four nights successively ... The high-constable of Westminster not only made a very great bonfire, but gave a hogshead of strong beer at his door. This the mob had no sooner consumed than they broke all the windows, and fell to demolishing his house ... They had several men in the middle of them with great flaskets of paving-stones ready for the slingers ... to demolish whatever was out of their reach by throwing with their hands. (III: 200-1)

Such resentment had been fostered for some time. As early as October 1738 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had written to Pomfret that “our mobs grow very horrible” (II: 125). The mob was often perceived as directly threatening the aristocracy. Porter notes that during the eighteenth century “The lava flow of violence ran through the political landscape, sometimes underground, sometimes on the surface ... peers’ carriages [were often] pelted and rocked, and their windows smashed, as they left

Westminster" (1990, 101). I am not here saying that the Countesses seriously believed that a reign of terror was imminent: that the autumn leaves were finally beginning to fall upon the magnate class's enjoyment of "a long hot summer of unthreatened political superiority" (61). The urban instigators of riots had limited aims, which they achieved with the fall of Walpole, and the rioters themselves were clearly only in business until the strong beer ran out. But the eruption of such dangerous passions in London throughout the course of their long correspondence certainly caused the Countesses to dig even deeper in to their redoubt.

Their anxiety would have been exacerbated by rapid transformations taking place in the cultural, economic, and physical constitution of London: that predominant home of the emergent middle class throughout the period. Both Hertford and Pomfret were creatures of what Max Byrd describes as "the aristocratic court world that lay along the western curve of the Thames ... physically distinct [from the City and lying] north and west of Charing Cross" (1978, 52-3). The other part of London, the City, was to be found:

east of Temple Bar [where] the crowded, winding alleys and courtyards around St. Paul's, Cheapside, the Tower, Wapping, Hockley Hole enclosed the immemorial haunts of London's poor and, more and more in the eighteenth century, the site of its manufacturers as well as its commerce. (53)

It was from this part of the capital that to the west "rapidly developing squares like St. James's, Soho, Golden, Hanover, and Cavendish gave haven" (53). So, Pomfret had lived in Hanover Square (built in 1713) before she left for the continent; and Hertford first in Albemarle Street and then in Grosvenor Street (built in 1695). And yet it is clear that it is the City rather than Westminster that Roy Porter is speaking of when he notes that during the eighteenth century:

London became the marvel of the world, throbbing with news, spectacles and entertainment. Like New York in the 1920s, it operated as an addictive geography of the imagination, the hero—and often villain—of plays, poetry and Hogarthian prints. Symbolically, the key site for the new public culture was the coffee house.¹³

Again, John Brewer is describing the City when he notes that London at the time was “rather like late nineteenth-century New York or late twentieth-century Los Angeles: it stood out as the metropolis of the moment” (1997, xxv). No doubt it was just such throbbing and momentousness that Hertford declares—in her blanket condemnation of all “the hurry of London”—is “as indifferent to me as the rattling of the coaches, and has the same effect on my brain,—by stunning it without giving it any information” (II: 136). The effect of this transformation of London was to take control of culture out of the hands of the aristocracy and to put it into the hands of commerce: John Brewer, in *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, makes it quite clear that “the arts became more commercial and less courtly because they became more urban” (1997, xviii). This was very much a move from the drawing room to the coffee house (which was even “claimed as a new sort of urban territory” (38)).¹⁴ Despite the attentions of Hertford to such writers as Thomson, Shenstone and Duck, then, the cultural influence of London now emanated from the City and not from the court—headed as it was by the deeply unfashionable Hanoverians.

In their sustained attempt to foster in their redoubt a set of aristocratic values that would justify their position of privilege the Countesses were immediately threatened by the development of “a whole new culture [which] ... differed from the élitist culture of the nobility and the still vigorous traditional folk culture of the lower orders in its comprehensiveness” (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 213). In a moment of pique Pomfret reveals her anxiety when she berates Hertford as follows:

why will you treat me so like a tasteless trifler, as to make excuses because your letters are not written in the hurry of business, or the noise of town amusements? Is not one thought of your own more valuable than volumes of the designs, the contrivances, or even the exploits, of all the lovers, politicians, and heroes, that fill the scenes of private and of public life in our metropolis of London? (I: 141)

Similarly, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu informs Pomfret in November 1738 that “such letters as yours want not the trimmings of news, which are only necessary to the plain Spitalfields style” (II: 130). Langford, who terms the new culture of the urban middle class ‘politeness’, observes that “Contemporaries often thought of it,

disapprovingly for the most part, as the infiltration of metropolitan mores into every corner of the land and every social class" (1989, 71). The Countesses, with the help of Montagu, fought a rearguard defensive action against this infiltration and its upstart code of manners. The action was based upon the body of views aptly expressed by Montagu, in a letter of 26th July 1738, in which she reassures her slightly doubting friend Pomfret that she is indeed "capable of many pleasures that the herd of mankind are insensible of" (II: 119).

The threat that emanated from the City was by no means only cultural. For the mid-eighteenth century was also a time of almost unparalleled physical and economic urban growth; with many, like Sambrook, identifying "the growth of London ... [as] the crucial factor in England's transformation ... [in]to a powerful, integrated exchange economy" (1986, 78-9). And yet the processes which account for urban growth have only recently begun to be understood. Geographers such as R. J. Johnston speak of "a self-propelling growth process" which can be charted according to the laws of an equation known as "the *multiplier*" (1980, 99-100). Others such as the historian E. A. Wrigley speak in terms of social and economic changes "at once produced or emphasized by London's growth and serving in turn to reinforce the growth process, a typical positive feedback situation, to borrow a term from communication engineering" (1975, 83). The elucidation of such processes helps to explain why no industry develops in isolation; and why urban growth often takes place exponentially. In contrast, during the eighteenth century such processes were looked upon with fear and London was seen as "a city gone wild with growth" (Byrd 1978, 101). The original strategy employed in the face of this fear—which took grip long before the 1700s—was brute containment. Thus John Summerson notes that: "Elizabeth [I] and her Stuart successors tried bluntly to stop any expansion [of the City] whatever" (quoted in Vance 1977, 230). But during the seventeenth century several events conspired to make containment impossible: chief amongst these being the rebuilding occasioned by the Great Fire of 1666 followed by what Colin Nicholson (and several others) have since identified as a 'financial Revolution' (1994, *passim*). After the Great Fire London was "increasingly organized for productive and expansible economic activities, in sharp contrast to the rigidly

constrained economy of medieval times" (Vance 1977, 233). Therefore it is not difficult to see why the court world to the west was threatened by expansion of the City to the east: for such power as Hertford and Pomfret had was based on land, not on money or commerce.

Attempting to counter claims that an industrial revolution took place first in Britain as a result of a relatively 'open aristocracy', Cannon notes that it was "extremely rare for a younger son of a peer to go into trade"; whereas in France "most of heavy industry was owned by the French nobility" (1984, 7 and 8). This evidence falls into line with my argument that the English aristocracy feared the contamination of trading classes based in the City and driving the growth of London. For example, on 19th July 1740 Pomfret writes sarcastically to Hertford that:

our present polity (I think) is that we are a trading nation, and each ought to shift for himself; that property should circulate, and not stay in one family. Surely our country will grow very powerful according to this maxim, for this is the very principle upon which the Turkish empire is founded. (I: 300)

But it was very difficult entirely to avoid the influence of the trading classes. Pomfret writes of her correspondence with Hertford that: "nothing can be more agreeable than such a commerce, the returns of which never come so soon as desired" (I: 91-2). And Hertford even more overtly makes use of the language of high finance when she writes: "as I have no fund within myself to entertain you, I naturally endeavour to furnish myself from the stock of others" (I: 124). This is clear evidence, also seen in a number of other places by a host of eighteenth century writers, of "the vices of the 'city' ... infecting not only London, but the Court" (Dickinson 1979, 173). And yet in the light of the Countesses' shared loathing of "the hurry of business" (I: 141) I cannot join with Linda Zionkowski in seeing such correspondences as theirs as a "commerce in letters" (1988, *passim*). It is much more likely that the Countesses were indulging each other in a fanciful conceit than that they were themselves really seeing the exchange of their letters in terms of commercial transactions. When analysing their own correspondence Hertford and Pomfret more often speak of each other's ability to make "a return of amusement" (I: 315). Thus Hertford asks "what return can I make for the most agreeable letters in

the world ...?" (I: 128); and Pomfret wishes in one letter that she "could give your ladyship any return in this for the entertainment [your last letter] gave me" (I: 182). In this sense it is more useful to see a correspondence—as does Ellen Strenski—in terms of "the mutual obligation generated by the offering and exchange of gifts" (1996). For by these means the Countesses oppose their own aristocratic system of exchange to that of the coarse and undignified—although highly infectious—system of exchange developed after the financial revolution in the City.

It was also difficult for the Countesses to avoid contact with London in other ways. For in the eighteenth century the technologies of communication were firmly rooted in the City. Any letter going to or from the continent had to pass under the eyes of the Foreign Secretary at the General Letter Office, housed at Lombard Street. The systematic carriage of foreign letters by any other means was strictly forbidden by the "monopolistic nature of the contract" between Parliament and the Post Office (Robinson 1948, 44). For Hertford, the knowledge that her private writings—and private writings addressed to her—were wending their way about the streets of east London on their way to or from the west, was an almost constant source of anxiety. For example, in one letter she jokes: "I inquire after the French mail as if I were carrying on a correspondence in order to steal the dauphin; and actually listen to every double knock at the door, in hopes of the post-man" (I: 93). But the tentative joke, that if she were carrying on a political intrigue she should be afraid that her letters might be opened and read and her plots discovered, conceals a real source of anxiety on this point.¹⁵ Herbert Joyce reveals that one of the chief causes of the "distrust and hostility with which the Post Office appears to have been regarded towards the middle of the [eighteenth] century", was the fact that certain "letters bore evident signs of having been opened at the Post Office" (1893, 170). So, in another letter Hertford is in no mood to joke and tells Pomfret that "I could say a great deal to you by word of mouth, which I cannot venture to insert in a letter, lest some one should have the curiosity to open it before it reaches you" (I: 66-7); and at one point she almost despairs—at least whilst using the General Post—of ever having "an opportunity of sending a letter that does not run the hazard of being opened before it reaches you" (I: 116). Similarly, in a letter of 27th April 1728 to Mrs Clayton

Pomfret notes that: "tho' I could trust you with any thing, and every thing, yet I dare not do so by the Postman" (f. 146). Of course Pomfret and Hertford had no real reason to fear that their letters would be opened for political reasons. So what was the real source of this anxiety?

Howard Robinson explicitly associates the contemporaneous rise of the Post Office with the "need for improved communications [as a result of] ... the expansion of industry and commerce in the first half of the eighteenth century" (1948, 100). Particularly important in the steep slant of this rise was the administrative genius of Ralph Allen of Bath, "whose father was a Cornish innkeeper" (100). Such a service under such a leadership would for obvious reasons not have been immediately palatable to the Countesses. On several occasions Hertford complains to Pomfret of instances of carelessness on the part of the Post Office. For example she writes: "the courier who had the care of your last letter, dear madam, had used it in so terrible a manner that it was almost impossible to know how to set about opening it; for it had been in the water, and the cover was entirely off at one end. The letter itself was made into a kind of pasteboard" (III: 197). And again on 9th April 1741 that:

no one could be more unlucky that I was last week about the letter I wrote to your ladyship. I sent it to the foreign post-house, in Albemarle-street, on Tuesday, and my footman gave sixteen pence with it. On Thursday night it came back to me, with a note from the general post office, to say that the man in Albemarle-street had made a mistake, and should have taken two shillings, because it was a double letter. I was so vexed at this disappointment that I would not send it back to them ... (III: 48)

That the Countesses explicitly associated such shoddy and intrusive treatment of their letters only with the Post Office is revealed in their constant attempts to find other means of transmitting their letters. For example, at one point Hertford leaps at the chance of "sending a letter ... by an exempt in my lord's troop, who is a very honest man" (I: 116); and later on in the correspondence she reveals that:

for many months past, I have ordered [my letters] always to be sent to the duke of Newcastle's office—one of the clerks there being my near relation, and a very sober man. I dare say he is very careful of them: but my porter has so much leisure to drink my health when I am in the country, that I believe he

sometimes mistakes Friday for Thursday, and the post-house in Albemarle-Street for the secretary's office. (I: 331)

Behind this reluctance to use the Post Office was clearly a yearning for the old courtly monopoly on the transport of letters by trusted private couriers. Porter notes that at the time "communications were sluggish ... [and the] mail was costly" (1990, 37). And yet it was clearly far more efficient than any private alternative as a ready means of overcoming what Pomfret describes as "this terrible distance (for I confess I feel it so every day more and more)" (I: 170). Besides, it is very unlikely that the Countesses ever paid for their extensive use of the postal services: "MPs and peers used their parliamentary privilege of franking covers to favour family, friends, and political connections" (Langford 1989, 409). On the other hand, the money saved in franking was perhaps offset for Hertford by the extra visibility occasioned by a system that clearly marked out her letters to whomsoever was handling them as belonging to an aristocrat. Equally revealing was the fact that letters to her from Pomfret were stamped from a variety of interesting places on the Continent.¹⁶ For both of these reasons the private letters of aristocrats must have stood out a mile amongst a host of tedious looking business letters travelling through the Post Office.

That use of the service caused the Countesses so much anxiety is a clear proof of their imaginations of epistolary space; and of the thin veneer that separated their fragile aristocratic redoubt from the expanding streets of east London. Linda Colley goes some way towards explaining their anxiety when she describes the eighteenth century City as containing:

coffee houses, bawds, crowds surging around a gibbet, strolling actresses with overflowing white bosoms, raucous street-criers jostling for space with fiddlers, pick-pockets, fine ladies and fat, glistening clergymen, taut faces of gamblers picked out by greed and candlelight, madmen howling in Bedlam, the damp high walls of Fleet prison ...¹⁷

As if confronted with just such a disturbing vision Hertford complains at one point that when her letters are lost or mislaid by the Post Office the couriers "do me a real injury, and pick my pocket of something more valuable than my money" (II: 195). The phrase is telling, indicating that it was transit through the City of London that the

Countesses feared above all the other stages of the long journey that each of their letters had to complete in order to reach its intended addressee.¹⁸ For Langford notes “the common belief of the time that crime was growing beyond control” and the particular case of one criminal who:

earned a permanent place in the rogues’ gallery by ... sheer notoriety. Jane Webb, alias Mary Young, alias ‘Jenny Diver’ after the cant name for a pickpocket and the character in the *Beggar’s Opera* ... ran a bawdy-house until the extortion of ‘Civility money for Bridewell men’ diverted her attention to pickpocketing, her true *métier*, which was terminated only with her transportation in 1738 and execution three years later. (1989, 155 and 157)

Webb’s period of notoriety, then, coincided almost exactly with that of the Countesses’ correspondence. It perhaps contributed to their perception of the City as a den of thieves picking letters out of epistolary space rather than out of pockets; a perception fully in keeping with contemporaneous perceptions of Daniel Defoe who used the City as the setting for *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*, novels which can be seen as the progenitors of crime fiction.

Even in terms of religious feeling the City provided a perceived threat to the Venetian oligarchy at just this time—for as Langford notes:

1739 was to be the *annus mirabilis* of the evangelical awakening. Denied the pulpit at Islington by the churchwardens, [George Whitefield] cheerfully resorted to the churchyard, and then to open space best known for highwaymen and horse-races, Moorfields, Kennington Common, Hackney Marsh, Marylebone Fields. (1989, 244)

Hertford was very quick to react to a new phenomenon initiated by “a group of zealots”, including the Wesley brothers, which promised “more earnest and systematic religious observances [and] ... a desire to share with others the spiritual benefits which accrued” (Hughes 1940, 350). In a letter of 1st September 1739 she writes to Pomfret as follows:

I do not know whether you have heard of our new sect, who call themselves Methodists. There is one Whitfield at the head of them ... who has for some

months gone about preaching in the fields and market-places in the country; and in London at May-fair and Moorfields, to ten or twelve thousand people at a time ... [the Methodists now] have such crowds of followers, that they have set all the clergy of the kingdom in a flame ... What appears to me most blameable ... is the uncharitable opinions they entertain in regard to the salvation of all who do not think and live after their way ... I have heard one particular since I began my letter, from the recorder of Bristol ... he says that Mr Whitfield has been much among the colliers in that neighbourhood ... (I: 159-62)

Despite her evident concern about the type and numbers of adherents Whitefield was attracting, Hertford is in general guardedly in sympathy with the aims of the evangelical awakening: perhaps as a result of what Hughes terms (and what Walpole and others mocked) her “natural piety” (1940, 349).¹⁹ Pomfret, too, notes on 28th September 1739 that: “whilst they start no new opinions, I cannot but wish (though I dare not hope) that their doctrine may prevail” (I: 163). This may seem surprising, since “From the beginning Methodism was identified with the religious life of the lower and middle classes”; and “found its most promising environment in semi-industrial communities ... or in places of rapid urban development” (Langford 1989, 252 and 252-3). Famously, Methodism did find a useful ally in Selina, Countess of Huntingdon; but as Langford makes clear the “aristocratic component of the evangelical revival was [always] small” (254). For Hertford and Pomfret the revival soon proved to be no more than another dangerous infection of the aristocratic world at the hands of London and other growing cities like Bristol; as in spite of the conservative element imparted to the movement by John Wesley, “particularly in its early manifestations, Methodism showed some hostility towards the wealthy and well-bred” (Cannon 1984, 60). So, despite her eagerness to express her piety Hertford writes to the Reverend James Wilkins on 25th April 1749 that: “I am afraid I am a little in disgrace with Lady Huntingdon for refusing to attend Mr. Whitefield on Thursdays and Sundays at her house” (quoted in Hughes 1940, 380). Her reasons for this refusal are revealed in a letter of September 1747 to the same addressee:

I think it a pity that [Lady Huntingdon] cannot approve of some divine of our own Church, or such men (even among the Dissenters) as Dr. Watts or Dr. Doddridge, rather than these men who have by their field-preaching and wild

conduct brought an odium upon themselves and a suspicion upon their doctrine in the eyes of many sober, well-disposed Christians. (371-2)

Hertford at least, then, soon came to an opinion that was not very far from that expressed by the duchess of Buckingham in her vitriolic response to a letter from Lady Huntingdon soliciting support for the Methodists: “their doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect toward their superiors ... monstrous ... highly offensive and insulting ... at variance with high rank and good-breeding” (quoted in Hughes 1940, 352).

Pressure from the ‘Venetian oligarchy’

The Countesses faced a series of frontal assaults, then, upon their aristocratic redoubt—both from inside and from outside the bounds of the larger fortification of the aristocracy. Their response was to dig in even deeper and to prepare their defences always with an eye to the counter-attack. In a letter of 26th November 1740 Hertford informs Pomfret that she will have to spend the winter in town as a result of her husband’s chronic gout:

otherwise, I confess that a winter passed in the country, has in it nothing terrible to my apprehension; I find our lawns ... a more agreeable prospect than dirty streets, and our sheep-bells more musical than the clamour of hawkers. I fear my taste is so much depraved, that I am as well pleased whilst I am distributing tares to my pigeons, or barley to my poultry, and to the robin- redbreasts and thrushes which hop under my window among them to share their banquet, as I shall be when I am playing cards in an assembly, or even in the _____. (II: 158-9)

Paston notes that “The blank which discretion dictated in the days when the post-office suffered from political curiosity may probably be filled up by the word ‘Court’” (1901, 27). In other words Hertford is here describing a place that is not only anti-court but anti-urban; an aristocratic ideal. Hertford describes in detail her gradual construction of this ideal during the whole course of her correspondence with Pomfret—as if putting another layer of aristocratic taste around the vulnerable

epistolary space set up by her letters. So, on 15th November 1739 she writes to Pomfret that:

we have now taken a house just by Colnbrook. It belongs to my lord Bathurst; and is what Mr. Pope, in his letters, calls his *extravagante bergerie*. The environs perfectly answer the title; and come nearer to my idea of a scene in Arcadia, than any place I ever saw. The house is old, but convenient; and when you are got within the little paddock it stands in, you would believe yourself an hundred miles from London, which I think a great addition to its beauty. (I: 198)

In fact the estate of Richkings Park lay only seventeen miles out of London along the post road to Bath. It was thus convenient for the mail; and yet also allowed for the creation “in the heart of the country [of] a sanctum of civilisation” (Porter 1990, 45). The intention of such creations, as Porter makes clear, was the performance of “a disappearing act”; as across the country the aristocracy by means of “Plantations, walls and gates raised a *cordon sanitaire*” (45). Through this *cordon* only letters were permitted to venture; and only then with the degree of anxiety that has been already demonstrated.

The landscape gardening activities of eighteenth century aristocrats have attracted a great deal of academic attention in recent years. For example Sambrook notes that:

irregular landscape garden[s] which gradually evolved in eighteenth-century England ... [were] seen by many as a reaction against the symmetry, ostentation, and tyranny of the French style, but ... [were] also in some respects a natural development from the French. One should not forget that Pope, perhaps the most influential publicist of the new English style, linked Inigo Jones and Le Nôtre in terms of highest praise ... (1986, 155)

In illustration of this trend, the gardens at Longleat where Hertford had grown up “followed the formal French fashion established by Le Nôtre at Versailles” (Hughes 1940, 4). And in direct contrast is the garden that was in existence at Richkings by the time that Hertford wrote to Lady Luxborough on 4th May 1747:

[Lord Hertford] has converted a long narrow walk which runs at the bottom of [the Park] into the resemblance of a wild lane in the country ... On the one hand, there is for about forty or fifty yards an open grove, through which you see a corn-field ... and bordered all round under the wood with ... every flower that grows wild in the fields which is capable of adding a variety to the many colors which are blended in that border; but there is nothing on the side next the corn to separate it ... On the other side of the canal ... a hedge of sweet-briar, and the rest a mixture of all manner of sweet shrubs. (quoted in Hughes 1940, 384-5)

This description is in entire accord with the “essential principles of natural gardening” laid down by the poet (once patronised by Hertford) William Shenstone in his *Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening*: “rejection of formal layout, especially the straight lines of hedge and shrub which had been universal in ‘polite’ gardens a few years before; awareness of the sentimental and picturesque possibilities of well-sited ruins and memorials; above all, total integration of garden and landscape” (Langford 1989, 311). And, as Paston notes, Hertford often in her letters expresses regret “at the prevailing rage for pulling down venerable castles and abbeys, and replacing them by modern Gothic” (1901, 27). That this was not the direction that Bathurst might have taken in his gardening if he had retained possession is revealed by Pope’s oft repeated advice “that Bathurst should have ‘considered the genius of the place’ and raised two or three artificial mounts at Rich[k]ings Park ... ‘because his situation is all a plain, and nothing can please without variety’” (Sambrook 1986, 159). Langford notes that by the third quarter of the eighteenth century Capability Brown had made “the familiar landscape of woodland, vale, and water ... obligatory on country estates” (1989, 310). But natural gardening “In the early stages ... was compatible with a richly emblematic, even a manifestly political, design” (311). This design was a form of ‘classical patriotism’ that expressed the feelings and aspirations of a specifically English aristocracy that had as its legacy the Revolution of 1688. Its philosophy of place is expressed by Pope in the ‘Epistle to Burlington’ of 1731:

Who then shall grace, or who improve the Soil?
 Who plants like BATHURST, or who builds like BOYLE.
 ’Tis Use alone that sanctifies Expence,
 And Splendour borrows all her rays from Sense.
 (1966, 320 ll. 177-80)

Hertford was no great fan of Pope's writing but she would no doubt have been at least familiar with the ideas expressed in this epistle; and would certainly have aspired to deserve the sort of praise that Pope heaped on Lord Burlington for his sensible and responsible use of riches. The garden at Richkings was a statement of intent in the face of a Hanoverian dynasty that in the person of George II in the late 1730s and early 1740s was beginning to look once more, as the War of the Austrian Succession began to take shape, to the battlefields of Europe. The patriot Opposition had no desire to see George II leading armies of conquest on the continent, for this could only boost the King's profile at the expense of a magnate class that desired all the attention itself. It therefore sought whenever possible to demonstrate the responsibility of its own use of both power and riches.

However, even in the creation of such an elaborate rural retreat as that of Richkings Park Hertford was not long free from anxiety. Having travelled through the country on her way to another of the family's estates at Marlborough, Hertford describes to Pomfret on 14th June 1741:

the finest weather imaginable ... I never saw such an air of plenty as appeared on both sides the road, from the vast quantities of corn with which the fields are covered, and the addition of many hop-gardens. These, and indeed every other beautiful appearance of nature, vanished when we came to Newbury. There is just set up a manufactory there, which (though it is said to bring incredible gain to the proprietors) adds neither beauty nor pleasure to the town and adjacent fields. (III: 266-7)

This was a very unwelcome intrusion of city financiers into a paradisaal country (notably devoid, in Hertford's description, of people). Recent geographic theory has drawn attention to what James Johnson describes as "the delimitation of the areas joined by social and economic bonds to a particular urban settlement" (1967, 80-1). Geographers have variously termed these areas hinterlands, umlands, urban fields, tributary areas, or zones of influence; but in doing so have only highlighted the increasingly serious problem of defining what is and what is not city. However, no such reassuring theoretical devices were available to Hertford and her contemporaries. On the effects of commerce on Britain by the 1770s Langford notes that: "Walpole's generation would have been startled to find it threading the

landscape with waterways, raising cities and suburbs" (1989, 6). But from the evidence of Hertford's letters anxiety was present much earlier: perhaps even in the form expressed by Matt Bramble, in a letter to Dr. Lewis, in Tobias Smollett's novel *Humphrey Clinker*: "if this infatuation continues for half a century, I suppose the whole county of Middlesex will be covered with brick" (1966, 86).

Perhaps even more alarming was the fact that the financial revolution was signalled by the "emergence of new types of personality, unprecedentedly dangerous and unstable" (Nicholson 1994, 7). These were 'City types'—with "the City in what was then a comparatively new sense, that of its 'monied interest'" (Sutherland 1975, 157). That Hertford had a horror of such types is revealed by her reaction to the improvidence of Lord Weymouth, the heir of her childhood home:

but, alas, how short-sighted is human judgement! Long-Leate, with its gardens, park, and manor, is mortgaged (though its owner never plays) to gamesters and usurers, for twenty-five thousand pounds. So that probably in twenty years' time, as Mr Pope says, it may
 "Slide to a scrivener, or city knight;"
 which I must own would mortify me exceedingly ... (II: 37)

It was a horror wholly shared by Pomfret who unreservedly and disproportionately praises the young Lord Brook for his conduct in "taking possession, with a grandeur worthy his blood and fortune, of the noble palace of his ancestors; and not skulking, like a modern hero, in a cheesecake house" (III: 232). The effects of the growth of London, then, were experienced deep in a country that was felt to be the rightful preserve of the aristocracy. Small wonder that the Countesses gradually retreated into their letters to each other.

It was a correspondence that offered a great deal of comfort. In the course of her travels Pomfret visited and then wrote to Hertford about the cities of Paris, Lyons, Genoa, Siena, Florence, Rome, Bologna, Venice and Frankfurt. In doing so she was bound to draw comparisons between the spiralling growth of London and the comparative containment of continental cities. Vance describes a:

fundamental distinction to be drawn ... between a city shaped by land speculation and land-and-housing market forces in the English world, and a

city far more clearly the product of design decisions taken for purposes of “taste” and ostentation on the Continent. (1977, 230)

Giulio Argan points out that it was in Italy during the Renaissance that “a theory, or science, of the city was created” (1969, 11). This theory concentrated upon schemes for ideal cities contained within permanent city walls, and so permanently controllable by the ruling classes. Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the allure that Florence in particular had for Pomfret. For example, she draws particular attention to the pleasing fact that “our English [horse] races are in the country; those of Florence in the city” (I: 326); a clear retention of control of urban space by the aristocracy.²⁰ So, when Pomfret enthusiastically describes Florence as “so fine a picture” (I: 223) she is implicitly contrasting Florence, in that she addresses such writings to Hertford, with London. All the more so in that Pomfret was receiving letters at roughly the same time from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in London: describing “all the fogs and spleen” and the character of an unremittingly “stupid town” possessed of an “epidemical dulness” (II: 122, 120 and 119). The depth of description that Pomfret enters into in some of her letters almost defies reading. She describes cathedrals and public buildings down to the minutest measurement—as for instance the Duomo in Florence with “its length ... a hundred and thirty English ells: the breadth of the tribune, eighty three; that of the nave, thirty five and a half: the height, from the ground to the top of the cross, a hundred and one; and the circumference six hundred and forty” (II: 3). The city of Florence even moves her to verse—as in the following lines:

This day the circle of the year's complete,
 Since, Florence, I beheld thy pleasing seat
 [...]
 But ere I quite forsake the lov'd retreat,
 There are a thousand things I would repeat
 [...]
 My letters scarce have told you how I liv'd,
 What converse held, what favours I've receiv'd:
 [...]
 All these, though tedious to another ear,
 A friend like you is not displeas'd to hear.
 (II: 140-2)

It is hard to imagine Pomfret expending such eulogy upon London. But she is quite right in surmising that her letters will not bore Hertford—who replies:

I am sincerely obliged by your goodness, in giving me the description of your house and gardens. I have (in imagination) sat with you by your fountain, and walked with you under your orange-trees; have examined your grotto ... I am become so perfectly acquainted with Florence, from the lively picture you have given me of it, that I am sure I could almost draw a plan ... (I: 287)

There is no trace of irony here. In fact this last admission represents clear evidence of imaginations of epistolary space at work in the Countesses' correspondence; providing a refuge teeming with descriptions of cities wholly unlike the threatening and vulgar City of London, very soon to be depicted and celebrated for its vigour by William Hogarth in such works as *Beer Street* (1751).

The last defensive position represented by the Countesses' letters provides a retreat within which they are able to achieve the "continuation of the art of conversation; which for a generation that liked to imagine itself Augustan was the very mark of polite society, possible only among civilized men and women" (Davis 1966, 13). Paston, amongst others, is not at all impressed by the letters. She notes that:

A lesson on the courtly good manners of the period may be learned from the compositions of both ladies, though one may be permitted to rejoice that so much ceremony and such high-flown acknowledgements of small favours are not expected between intimate friends in the present day. (1901, 11)

And yet the Countesses would no doubt have been slightly alarmed to hear their letters being charged with savouring too much of the 'court' that they both loathed. For as Howard Anderson and Irvin Ehrenpreis note: "Throughout the [eighteenth] century, epistolary theory subordinated 'art' to 'nature,' the composed to the unplanned, with an enthusiasm scarcely looked for in an age celebrated for its decorum" (1966, 272). Hertford and Pomfret were always keen to advocate such a theory of letter writing. For example, on one occasion Hertford writes: "You see, my dear lady Pomfret, that I rely upon your friendship, and in that confidence venture to

talk to you of whatever is uppermost in my thoughts" (I: 248); and on another that "when I am writing to you, I cannot stop my pen till it has intrusted you with all the chimeras and follies that chance at the time to go through my brain" (I: 305). Anderson and Ehrenpreis imply that such comments as these form, whether consciously or unconsciously, a part of a controversy over epistolary style that had been revived in the seventeenth century and that dated back to the time of Cicero, Pliny, and Seneca: "The issue was not whether letters should be more or less formal ... Rather, it concerned how best to achieve informality" (1966, 272). The Countesses themselves make it plain that the perceived informality of their own letters is a blessed relief from the forms of the court from which they had both retired in 1737. However, the informal aristocratic manners of their redoubt were—as I have demonstrated—constantly liable to pressure both from within and without the aristocracy. Dickinson notes that during the 1730s and 1740s: "there were already the signs of those political tactics, methods and ideas that were soon to create a radical opposition to the aristocratic dominance of British politics" (1984, 67). The fear of absolutist tendencies in the Hanoverian dynasty, also, was ever present; so much so, that Dickinson has even suggested that in this period "stability and strife were symbiotic, not antithetical" (quoted in Black 1984, 19). Hertford and Pomfret were not to know as much. Rather, like in the furtive mid-Victorian correspondence between Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, in A. S. Byatt's novel *Possession*, these letter writers appear constantly on the verge of fearing "that even the letters, that space of freedom, must be put an end to" (1991, 193).

REFERENCES

¹ All quotations from Horace Walpole's letters are taken from W. S. Lewis *et al.* (1937-83); and followed by volume and page numbers in brackets.

² See Geoffrey Holmes and Daniel Szechi for further discussion of the remarkably "smooth transition in British politics from the Augustan age of party to the new order of 'Venetian oligarchy'" (1993, 16). J. H. Plumb notes that this new order "fused the interests of aristocracy, high finance, and executive government" (1967, 187); and Holmes that "Oligarchic politics in the age of Walpole and the Pelhams was an intricate game, played out by a limited number of players according to certain recognised rules" (1987, xiv).

³ All quotations from the correspondence between the Countesses are taken from the second edition of 1806; and followed by volume and page numbers in brackets. The

1806 edition confusingly dates the letters in a mixture of old (Julian) and new (Gregorian) styles. I have consistently dated all the letters in the old style, but the year is treated as beginning on 1st January throughout.

⁴ Mrs Clayton was Caroline's favourite Lady of the Bedchamber and afterwards became Lady Sundon.

⁵ In his 'Anecdote of Lady Pomfret' Horace Walpole supplies his own commentary on this episode: "Having ruined her husband's estate by buying pennyworths, [Lady Pomfret] went abroad to save money; continued to buy all the trumpery she met with, as often as she thought it cheap, which was as often as she met with it" (XIV: 247).

⁶ All quotations from Montagu's letters are taken from Halsband's edition (1965-7); and followed by volume and page numbers in brackets.

⁷ All quotations from Pomfret's letters to Mrs Clayton are taken from the third volume (1714-37) of the unpublished Sundon Correspondence which is kept in the British Library as Additional MS 20,104; and followed by a folio number in brackets.

⁸ Pomfret's lavishness backfired later as a result of the profligacy of her son, George. George Cokayne notes that George Fermor appears to have been involved in at least two duels and was rumoured to have married a stout heiress for her money in 1764: "in later life he is described as eccentric and 'mad' ... Owing to his extravagance he was compelled to sell the contents of Easton Neston [his mother's childhood home], including his grandfather's collection of statuary, which was bought by his mother" (1945, X: 574).

⁹ For example Hertford notes in one letter that "Lady Caroline Sackville is to be married" (I: 76); in another that "I do not know whether it will be any news to you that the young lady Bulkely, after being a widow for about four months, has married one Williams, a tide-waiter" (I: 150-1); and in another that "I hear that my lord Northampton is certainly going to be married to lady Frances Brudenell" (III: 273).

¹⁰ As does Clarence Tracy, Savage's biographer: "It is not impossible that the 'gentle Hertford' did act as Johnson believed, for she was a friend of poets, and was at the time interested in James Thomson, an intimate friend of Savage. But no acquaintance existed between her and Savage either before or after the event, and no reference to Savage has been found among her numerous papers. Savage never mentioned her, though he was often lavish of the form of gratitude that consists in publicly acknowledging benefactors" (1953, 92).

¹¹ James Sambrook notes that "Johnson was certainly misinformed over the lack of future summons, whatever may have been his accuracy in the matter of carousing: Thomson's visits to Lord and Lady Hertford continued in the 1730s and it appears that the Countess retained an interest in the poet's career down to his death" (1991, 63).

¹² This letter is not included in the edition of 1806, which comes to a close as soon as Pomfret returns to England.

¹³ Porter makes these comments in a review entitled "Coffee and culture with Dr Johnson," published in the long weekend section of the *Independent*, 24th May 1997.

¹⁴ See also for discussion of this George Rudé, who details the process whereby "the prevailing aristocratic patronage and culture, based on the more fashionable quarters of Westminster and the Court of St James's, was ... being challenged by a new 'rich' or 'middling' culture and patronage based on the City and the Strand" (1971, xi).

¹⁵ In a letter to Pomfret of 4th November 1742, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu appears seriously to believe that several letters which have failed to reach her have been stopped for "mentioning political transactions"; she counters, perhaps in the hope that whoever has been reading her letters will be reading still, that "I desire no other intelligence from my friends but tea-table chat" (II: 294).

¹⁶ For instance Pomfret begins one letter as follows: "You, my dear lady Hartford will be surprised to find me in this city [by reading the postmark]; ... you will wonder we did not first come here" (I: 200).

¹⁷ This description is contained in an article entitled "A Very Modern Misfit," published in the review section of the *Independent on Sunday*, 7th September 1997.

¹⁸ When specifically referring to the moment of transmission of her letters through Italy, Hertford is less inclined to suspect malicious foul-play and more inclined to attribute the loss of letters to mere bad luck. For example she describes to Pomfret: "the vexation I am under, that fortune is so perverse to me as to make my letters miss their road to Florence" (I: 285).

¹⁹ Lady Luxborough slightly mocks this natural piety in a letter to Shenstone of 1753: "The Duchess of Somerset is too much retired to hear what passes, and is too much wrapped up in religious and moral reflections to admit of other subjects in her letters" (quoted in Hughes 1940, 349).

²⁰ Walpole provides a more lascivious explanation, in a letter to Henry Seymour Conway of 9th July 1740, for Pomfret's preference for Florence over London: "Lady Pomfret has a charming conversation once a week. She has taken a vast palace and a vast garden, which is vastly commode, especially to the cicisbeo-part of mankind, who have free indulgence to wander in pairs about the arbours" (XXXVII: 68-9).

CHAPTER FIVE. PETITIONS AND MEMORIALS FROM THE EDGE: THE LETTERS OF THE REV. DR LUCIUS HENRY HIBBINS TO THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE (1741-58)

"Flora! What is the matter? Do you feel sick? Is it your tummy again?" cried Mrs Smiling, in alarm.

"No. That is, not physically sick. Only rather nauseated by the way I have achieved these letters. Really, Mary"—she sat upright, revived by her own words—"it is rather frightening to be able to write so revoltingly, yet so successfully. All these letters are works of art ... They are positively oily."
from Stella Gibbons's Cold Comfort Farm (1938, 22)

G. F. A. Best judges that "The reputations of the clerical profession and the established church seem to have reached their lowest ebb in the seventeen-thirties and -forties" (1964, 93-4). There has been much recent academic debate as to why this might have been so. Geoffrey Holmes and Daniel Szechi acquit the Church of the time of many of the charges of worldliness and pastoral neglect levelled against it by contemporaries; and in mitigation against other charges draw attention to "how the Church had found itself in serious difficulties since the closing years of the seventeenth century, partly as a result of the Revolution, partly because of the intellectual climate of the age, and partly because long-standing economic weaknesses were aggravated by heavy taxation" (1993, 103). Such difficulties as these only increased as the eighteenth century drew on: for a traditionally Tory Church soon found itself struggling usefully to exist within an Erastian Whig oligarchy instituted in large part by Sir Robert Walpole. Church bells should have begun pealing in alarm when from 1717 the Church's form of central government, Convocation, was "prorogued by the Whigs, fearing the rabid Toryism of its lower house" (Porter 1990, 173). Then, in 1736, Bishop Edmund Gibson who had been for many years Walpole's loyal and trusted ecclesiastical lieutenant happened to disagree with his political master over the Quaker Relief (or Tithes) Bill and was immediately "disgraced and his far-reaching reform plans [henceforth] largely disregarded by the ministry and by Parliament" (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 101). The disagreement was occasioned by a growing sense within the established Church that despite their

continued support for the Whigs no attempt was being made to stem the growing, damaging, tide of Dissent. In addition to this perceived betrayal perhaps some within the clerical orders feared that even worse was yet to come—as a result of, what was in fact only one aspect of a whole wave of virulent anti-clericalism, the “extraordinary outcry against ‘church encroachments’ that broke out in the early thirties” (Best 1964, 102). If so then they would not have been far wrong. For Ian Green unequivocally finds that during this period “some of the Whigs ... had decided to take the Anglican clergy down a peg or two” (1981, 249). In the light of all of these developments it seems hardly an exaggeration to describe the years from the 1720s to the 1760s as an “age of crisis for religion” (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 108).

It was in this unfavourable climate (and perhaps because of it) that the impoverished Rev. Dr Lucius Henry Hibbins¹ wrote, between 1741 and 1758, his series of thirty or so letters to Thomas Pelham-Holles, the duke of Newcastle. Each of the letters represents a ‘petition’ or ‘memorial’ asking for some form of preferment—as in a letter of 19th August 1746 requesting “the Rectory, of Saint Mary Woolnoth, in the City of London, on the next avoidance”; or stipendiary reward—as in a letter of 5th June 1758 in which Hibbins writes that: “I request only a small Prebend, of Rochester, or Bristol, or Gloucester, or Worcester ... or, if it is more agreeable to your Pleasure, charitably dispose of some of the Royal Bounty, or Compassion money to me” (32708, f. 103 and 32880, f. 332).² Much of the contempt in which the eighteenth century Church has traditionally been held can be directly traced to just such petitioning. For example, in her study of clerical preferment under the duke of Newcastle Mary Bateson draws attention to the solicitation of personal favours and notes that:

since the frequent exhibition of this vice in former days is to us rather ludicrous than revolting, there may be some reason to hope that the evil in its most obtrusive form has ceased to exist ... it is difficult to realise that the letters which the duke of Newcastle received were written in all seriousness and frequently succeeded in obtaining for the writer the particular preferment he sought. (1892, 685)

Similarly, in his assessment of Newcastle as ‘ecclesiastical minister’ Norman Sykes describes “a generation of worldly and self-seeking clergy who were at little pains to conceal either their solicitation of favours or their resentment at denial” (1942, 60). William T. Gibson expresses surprise that both Bateson and Sykes ignore the letters of Hibbins. Indeed, he goes on to argue that “the correspondence indicates that the censorious attitude of historians to place-seeking and self-recommendation for preferment should be reconsidered” (1991, 87). This may well be so: and indeed it is hard to see what choice the clergy had when “In England about half of all advowsons were in the hands of private patrons” (Hempton 1990, 205). But the focus of this chapter will rather be on the nature and on the mechanics of the epistolary space that Hibbins maintains between himself and Newcastle for almost twenty years—in the attempt to secure for himself a good living.

In respect of the eighteenth century Church, Holmes and Szechi bemoan “the scarcity of those local studies which can throw so much light on the national picture” (1993, 103). This chapter constitutes just such a study: not of a physical parish or diocese but rather of the imagined locality that Hibbins sought to construct in epistolary space. The aim of this imagination was to attract Newcastle’s very divided attention. The correspondence will be seen as a locus of many of the social and political problems facing the Church of the time; and will thus provide explanations as to why ordinary clergymen were forced to act ‘badly’ and so to necessitate the work of many recent scholars in shedding “much valuable and sympathetic light on the plight of the lesser clergy” (Evans 1987, 231). In doing so it will advance the argument of my thesis—that along with the rapid development of the postal services of England came ever more common and complex imaginations of epistolary spaces. Moreover, that these imaginations were often emanating from the most unexpected sources.

A levee in epistolary space

There is little doubt that Hibbins was addressing his letters to the right man. For as Reed Browning notes, in September 1736, after Walpole’s final rupture with his once

favourite, “[Bishop] Gibson resigned his unofficial post as ecclesiastical minister. The obvious candidate to replace him was Newcastle” (1975, 79). Browning is quite clear as to why Newcastle wanted this post. He notes that the position of ecclesiastical minister “gave [Newcastle] significantly widened influence in the government because it provided him with a vast new arena in which, by dispensing patronage or withholding favors, he could foster political loyalties” (79). The acquisition of the post merely underlined the extent of Newcastle’s power under Walpole. His rise to great pre-eminence had been as a direct result of several factors: including early Whig loyalties, the unexpected settling on him as a young man of his uncle duke John’s vast estate and fortune, friendships with both Walpole and King George I, and a capacity for a great deal of work and activity. During the course of the period in which Hibbins wrote to him Newcastle was almost always holding the highest possible offices: “He was dominant secretary of state during one war and first lord of the treasury during another” (xi). In fact, there is little doubt that once Walpole had fallen, Newcastle—together with his brother Henry Pelham and his friend Lord Hardwicke—held most of the power in Britain throughout most of this period. Even following his resignation from the treasury in November 1756 “Newcastle was deferentially attended to because he could control the Commons ... and prevent any ministry he disliked from being formed” (255). His return to power in June 1757, even after the series of disasters and betrayals of his short premiership, was largely a foregone conclusion. But the strength of the grip required to maintain this hold on power was considerable. Ray Kelch notes that this was “England’s most aristocratic age”; and points to the fact that Newcastle’s often desperate financial position was as a direct result of the maintenance of “a grand ducal life style for over fifty years” (1974, 6 and vii). At the centre of this life style was the duke’s house of Claremont in Surrey, which he was constantly improving. As Browning notes, the house became a “showcase” and “the vast entertainments that Newcastle hosted at Claremont became famous” (1975, 36). When he was briefly out of office after his resignation the duke, much to the new ministry’s alarm, repeatedly entertained the whole of the diplomatic and political world at Claremont in an unabashed “pageantry of power” (255).³ Clearly, if a tiny sliver of power and influence was what you were

after then Newcastle was the right person to approach; as the least likely to notice that such a tiny pittance had been given away.

It is still perhaps a surprise, though, to find the lowly Hibbins persistently writing to the most powerful man in the country—rather than to a less powerful man with whom he stood a greater chance of being noticed and thus helped to a reasonably profitable benefice of some kind. Hibbins reveals his background in a petition of 23rd March 1743, which is addressed to Newcastle's close and almost equally powerful colleague Hardwicke, then the Lord Chancellor. This petition, written in the third person:

Sheweth, That your Lordship's Petitioner, who had practic'd as a Barrister, at Law; and serv'd in the Commissions of the Peace, for several years, within the County of Lincoln, with Reputation and Fidelity; was, some time agoe, engag'd to enter into Orders, in the Church, through the Persuasion & Encouragement of some of his Relations, then in Ireland; who enjoy'd offices, these, of great Honour, & Trust.

That by their unexpected & sudden Deaths, he has been disappointed of the Preferment, he had so great reason to hope for; and is, at this time, entirely unprovided. (35587, f. 115)⁴

Although this petition was signed by the duke of Ancaster, Lord Monson, and the bishop of Lincoln, as well as thirteen barristers, it is clear that Hibbins at this point was notably lacking the sorts of friends prepared to go out of their way to find him a living.⁵ For this reason, addressing Hardwicke, he “most humbly prays the Honour of your Lordship's Compassion and notice; and that you would be pleas'd to grant him a Presentation to some such Crown Living, as your Lordship, in your great Wisdom and Goodness, shall judge proper” (35587, 115). In terms of both time and place Hibbins was not in a good position at the start of his career as a clergyman. Eric Evans notes that “Only two of Lincoln's thirteen parishes in 1728 were worth as much as £30 a year; only five had an incumbent of any description” (1987, 223); and indeed Ian Green describes Lincolnshire during the eighteenth century as “a black spot, with literally hundreds of impoverished vicarages” (1981, 247). Small wonder then that Hibbins seems soon to have left the area—his first letter to Newcastle in

1741 being addressed from Norton, near Chichester. Not that things were much better elsewhere. For David Hempton reveals that:

out of every hundred men ordained in late Georgian England a fifth never held a benefice, a quarter died young, emigrated or went into teaching, and over a third took more than six years to find a living. Only a well-connected minority, a fifth of the total, found a benefice within five years of ordination. (1990, 207)

And indeed nothing permanent came out of the only letter that Hibbins seems to have sent to Hardwicke: for in a letter of 30th October 1747 Hibbins writes to Newcastle that he is “now, entirely, divested of my Employ, in the service of this Church” (32713, f. 350).

Even in such a precarious position Hibbins is never shy of addressing a letter to Newcastle. This despite what Browning identifies as “the lingering and potent respect Englishmen continued to have for men of title ... an ancient regard for nobility” (1975, 201). And yet it is precisely the form of the letter that allows Hibbins to overcome the awe and intimidating effect of such degrees of respect and regard. Having made a trip to Esher, in the near vicinity of Claremont, Hibbins notes in a letter of 10th August 1754 that “I did not presume to see Your Grace, then, at Claremont, because, I know, it is your will not to be attended there; or have your Grace’s Retirement interrupted; and your Grace has been pleas’d to allow, and command me, to address in this dutiful manner” (32736, f. 204). As well as being a centre of political networking Browning makes it clear that “Claremont came to symbolize escape for both duke and duchess” (1975, 36). Despite this there is a lingering feeling, much more evident earlier on in the correspondence, that it is far more appropriate when having something to request of a duke to attend his levee than to write him a letter. On 4th September 1749 Hibbins writes:

My Lord! I should not presume, Thus, to address, and remind your Grace, of your most noble Intentions; if a severe Illness, and other Disabilities—encreas’d by the Weight of a long series of Misfortunes and Disappointments—did not prevent my appearance at your Grace’s Levée: and that I have laid it down for a Rule—never to be departed from—not to dare to violate your Grace’s Retirement, Here, at Home. (32719, f. 103)

Hibbins was not alone and by no means the least of those who addressed requests to Newcastle in the form of letters. In March 1753 Edmund Turner wrote that “Not knowing any other method to gaine admittance to your Grace’s presence has induced me to take this, with all due Submission humbly begging to propose ... a method whereby the French may be Dislodg’d and prevented from ever settling on the Islands of St. Lucia, St. Vincents, Tobago or any other of those Islands at a very inconsiderable expense” (32731, f. 321); in May 1753 Anne Jackson that “it is with great reluctance that I presume to address you in this manner. But our unhappy circumstances obliges me, most humbly to beseech ... a sum of money or an augmentation to our Pension” (32731, f. 412); and also in 1753 one Lauderdale that “I had the honour to call at your Grace’s door this morning and would have spoke to you this day at St James’s but I saw you was hurried I therefore chose this as the least troublesome method of asking a favour of your Grace” (32731, f. 200). The embarrassment of asking for favours was elided in the construction of these imaginary forums for gaining admission to the duke. But that each of these supplicants feels that it is first necessary to apologize for approaching the duke in epistolary space rather than in the flesh suggests that such a practice was relatively new, and only just beginning to take over from—or to provide an alternative to—the levee.

The importance of the development of postal services in the opening up of epistolary spaces between commoners and the most exalted members of the aristocracy in the land is clearly revealed by a letter written on 28th June 1758 by Miss Mary Evans “For Some Relief” (32881, ff. 108-9). Evans first explains that she is “the daughter of a farmer in Hertfordshire and came to town some few months ago to get a service.” Having failed in this ambition she reveals that she has run out of money and can get no more from her father or from any other honest source. She pleads with the duke that “my great desire is to go for one year to learn to be a mantuamaker to get an Honest lively hood had I a little money for that purpose.” At the end of the letter she warns that “your Grace cannot but know the Danger a young Person, is Exposed to in this Town, if they have nothing to support themselves, I beg for God sake you’ll think of one as it is in your Power to save me from ruin.” Even

someone as famously lacking in imagination as Newcastle cannot have failed to recognize the scenario—reminiscent of scenes in William Hogarth's well known series of plates entitled *A Harlot's Progress* (1732)—sketched out in miniature by Evans. On the outside of her letter is the familiar triangular stamp of the London Penny Post; a service inaugurated by William Dockwra in the time of Sir George Etherege and subsequently forcibly taken over and then greatly expanded by the government. The stamp reveals that Evans sent her letter from the Westminster office on a Saturday. She notes that a reply to her letter can be received at "Mr Crumps Undertaker in Carnaby Street near Golden Square." It is conceivable then that she could have delivered herself, by hand, a letter addressed only as far away from her abode as "Lincolns Inn Fields." But the degree of anonymity afforded by the Penny Post—which did not require actually walking up to the duke's house, knocking for a letter to be accepted, and perhaps getting questioned by servants or other retainers—surely encouraged Evans to chance her luck with Newcastle whose "great Humanity and Charitable disposition made me so bold to lay my case before you." This encouragement was a consequence of the fact that, as Howard Robinson notes, "For most of the eighteenth century—until 1773—London was the only urban center in Great Britain and Ireland where mail was delivered. Elsewhere those receiving or mailing letters had to go to the one post office of the town" (1948, 192). In other words, access to such services was perhaps another inducement to country people when making the decision as to whether or not to come up to London. For anyone living within the bounds of the area served by the Penny Post could do the same as Evans and be admitted to an imaginary audience in epistolary space with the first lord of the treasury at the cost of only a penny. Nor was it necessary to go as far as Carnaby Street: for the Penny Post at this time served any district "within ten miles of the London Post Office" (192). How effective the sending of such letters as that written by Evans to Newcastle was, in material terms, is quite another question. However, towards the end of the period covered by this thesis it is clear that epistolary space was no longer imaginary home only to members of the gentry such as Dorothy Osborne and Sir George Etherege; or of the aristocracy such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Countesses of Hertford and Pomfret. Evans clearly

attempts to induce in Newcastle imaginations of what might be happening to a defenceless girl alone in the spaces between Lincoln's Inn Fields and Carnaby Street. She is able to do so only because she has access to the Penny Post. Thanks to rapid improvements in efficiency and costing the potential advantages to be gained from the creation of such imaginations were thus now filtering down and available to the lowest orders of the population.

For Hibbins himself there was a more personal reason for approaching Newcastle in epistolary space, rather than at a levee at Claremont or at one of the duke's other residences. Specifically, Gibson notes that "Hibbins seems to have had an unfortunate manner" (1991, 90). In a letter of 4th January 1741 Newcastle writes to the duke of Richmond, who periodically and sometimes lukewarmly supported Hibbins's requests for a living, that "Hibbins I don't take, but I have been very civil to Him" (quoted in McCann 1984, 53). Richmond writes back that "I own he's odd, butt certainly a clever fellow" (73); and Newcastle replies with evident distaste in reference to "your troublesome friend Hibbins, who is either Lawyer, Parson, or anything else, that serves his interest" (74). Much later on in a letter of 17th April 1749—not long before his death—Richmond writes to Newcastle that: "I know you will start at his name, because you formerly took a bad impression of him, give me leave to say a little without reason, tis Mr. Hibbins ... the poor man is quite drove to despair, unless you will out of compassion to him ... recommend him for some ... living" (283). In the imaginary realm of epistolary space Hibbins would have been able to efface much of his natural physical or habitual oddness; and perhaps to give an impression of his abilities and manner far removed from what they were in reality.

The tactic clearly worked for in 1749 Newcastle presented Hibbins to the modest living of Esher (which was situated very near to Claremont). But although this kept Hibbins quiet for almost three years the vast majority of his letters were yet to come. For on 5th May 1752 Hibbins writes: "My Lord! The value of this Living is far less than your Grace's apprehensions were of it ..." (32727, f. 92). By this time it appears that Hibbins had found himself well and truly caught in what Evans refers to as "the clerical poverty trap" (1987, 222). He had found that to get a living was in fact only to surmount the very first of the many hurdles placed across the life of the

average eighteenth century clergyman. The introduction of Queen Anne's Bounty was, it is true, working to combat clerical poverty at this time through a series of augmentations to the values of livings worth less than fifty pounds per year; and was even having some degree of success. But it was in its early stages, and by 1736 was still reporting that out of some 11,000 parishes in England and Wales as many as 5,600 offered only poor livings to their incumbents. Green notes, however, that such a figure is likely to overestimate the extent of clerical poverty as there were many ways of increasing the value of livings: for instance by picking up "sources of income of a professional or semi-professional nature: cathedral dignitaries, minor canonries or posts as vicars choral ... acting in the church courts [and so on]" (1981, 244). From 1752 Hibbins set himself to the task of picking up some one of these extra sources of income as when he writes in the third person to "pray relief ... that your Grace will please to grant him a Prebend in some Cathedral or Collegiate Church" (32727, f. 93). The means by which he chose to improve his living was the continued sending of letters to Newcastle.

Apart from his unfortunate manner, the sending of letters had the advantage over the levee of enabling Hibbins to keep his situation in Newcastle's mind at very regular intervals. In a letter of 3rd May 1753 Hibbins writes: "My Lord! I live out of the Realm of all Intelligence. I am diseas'd. A mere cripple. And very greatly reduc'd in my circumstance. Only your Grace commanded me to come up, againe, to London as last week; and so it became my duty; or I could, ill, have afforded it" (32731, f. 419). In such a situation it is not to be expected that Hibbins could make many visits to Newcastle's levees even when invited; either in terms of money or energy.⁶ At various times Hibbins writes from Norton (near Chichester), Esher (in Surrey), and Fobbing (in Essex); Newcastle on the other hand was most likely to be either in London or at Claremont. And so the distances between the two, for instance when one was at Claremont and the other in Fobbing, were likely to be considerable—especially given the poor transport communications of the time. In contrast, as many as seven letters survive from Hibbins to Newcastle from the year 1756; six from 1755; and four from 1752. Nor did Hibbins scruple to send letters to Newcastle when he was further afield. Browning reports that in 1752 Newcastle was

for the third time in five years persuaded to accompany George II “on the unpleasant trip to northern Germany” (1975, 177). This trip to the Hanoverian electorate was particularly arduous as Newcastle was hoping to secure both a Palatine treaty and an imperial election. When he finally arrived the duke can hardly have been pleased to discover a letter beginning: “your most humble Memorialist begs leave to felicitate your Grace on your safe arrival at Hanover: and to offer his Vows that, after a series of successful Negotiations, your Grace may have an happy Return to Britain!” (32727, f. 92). Hibbins clearly felt that he had scored a significant coup by discovering Newcastle’s Hanoverian address: what he describes as “this seasonable opportunity” (f. 92). In a further letter to Hanover of 24th July 1752 Hibbins implores Newcastle to “condescend to listen to the urgent Cryes of your servant’s misery!”; as “Your Grace is less beset with solicitors abroad than at home. O! use the opportunity, my Lord, to gratifie your own most Nobles Desires of doing Good” (32728, f. 361). At this point—as his negotiations with the various electoral princes of the Empire began ignominiously to collapse—Newcastle must have felt a surge of powerful nostalgia for the days of government monopoly over the postal services.

Adjusting to Erastianism

Holmes and Szechi speak of an “old generation of Whigs, of whom the Duke of Newcastle was to be the last survivor, [who] would never, even in their private exchanges, discount the possibility of a Tory revival” (1993, 46). Throughout his letters Hibbins plays on this and other anxieties in the attempt to construct in epistolary space a bewildering labyrinth of paranoia about the Tories; in which the duke would so lose his way that he would be intimidated for various reasons into paying Hibbins off. For example, he does so by means of constant reference to the events of 1715-16; and specifically to what Nicholas Rogers refers to as “the striking disaffection which marked the opening years of George I’s reign” (1978, 70). So, in a letter of 3rd May 1753 he reminds the duke that “I have spent several Thousand Pounds in promoting the Government’s Interest, in Lincolnshire—in the Worst of Times—as your Grace must have heard; and I can yet prove” (32731, f. 419-20). Not

least the duke must have heard of this from Hibbins himself—as on 30th October 1747 he had drawn attention as if casually to:

my Conduct, on an interesting Occasion: when some disaffected Persons having—in that unsettled time—rais'd so great, and dangerous a Riot (under pretence of stopping the exportation of corn, then, extremely cheap) that no other Magistrate could be prevail'd on, to venture out and suppress it; I, freely, expos'd my life to endeavour that Service, and had the good fortune to effect it; without the aid of a military force. (32713, f. 350)

Rogers points out that disturbances in 1715-16 were particularly widespread in Midland areas such as Lincolnshire; and that the rapid drawing up of the Riot Act was clearly “a response to a tense political situation in which the credibility of the government was at stake” (1978, 74). The potential explosiveness of the situation was such that “a Jacobite fifth column was a real possibility” (84). In later life and still wary of a Tory revival Newcastle cannot much have enjoyed continued reference to such insecure times. Gibson makes it clear that by the expected norms of the society in which he lived Hibbins was quite right to expect some reward for what he claimed to have done in Lincolnshire. And yet Holmes and Szechi affirm that the target of such protests as did occur were almost always property and not persons; casting doubt on the extent to which Hibbins really did ‘expose his life.’⁷ Moreover the persons most in danger in 1715-16, often indeed from rabble-rousing parsons proclaiming the ‘church in danger,’ were nonconformists: as throughout the provinces during these disturbances “more than forty nonconformist meeting-houses were demolished or sacked” (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 172). Although not yet a parson himself in 1715-16, Hibbins’s sympathies would clearly have been with the protesters and he may have managed to defuse the mob partly as a result of his own known complicity in their actions or aims. However, my interest is not in the rights and wrongs of the situation but rather in the lengths to which Hibbins was forced to go in order to assert his claims.

For Newcastle the receiving and reading of letters from Hibbins must have been like holding up a dark glass to his own past. After all, he and Hibbins were of a similar age and had experiences in common.⁸ For Newcastle too had been deeply

involved in the disturbances of 1715-16. Browning notes that in his capacity as lord lieutenant of Middlesex Newcastle had arranged for mass arrests of suspected persons and that "over 800 men submitted to questions from the duke and his deputies" (1975, 9); whereas Rogers refers to the duke's activities across London in funding his own loyalist mobs of mug-house bullies, vigilantes, and processional pope-burners. But as his youthful strength of purpose waned so too did Newcastle's gung-ho attitude to insurrection and riots; perhaps in the face of the wearing "continuous series of conspiracies, negotiations and revolts punctuating the history of Britain between 1689 and 1760" (Holmes and Szechi 1993, 97). Holmes and Szechi speak of the general "paranoia the Whig regime suffered on [the Jacobites'] account" (97). But Browning makes it clear that especially after the defeat of Cope at the hands of the Young Pretender, at Prestonpans in September 1745, "Newcastle was the most alarmed of the ministers" (1975, 132). Hibbins was quick to take advantage of this alarm. On 19th March 1746 he writes to Newcastle that:

As it is, now, upwards of Twenty years, since I had the Honour of your Grace's assurances, of assistance [*sic*], "in any Thing, within your Power" ... as from the Time, of the late Rebellion, in 1715,—whereof I was an active Instrument, to suppress it—to the present unnatural one; I have devoted my Life, and little Fortune, to the Promotion of that Glorious Interest, o'er which your Grace, so happily, presides ... I hope, it will be some Inducement, to your Grace's distinguish'd Goodness, to give me an opportunity to perpetuate so useful an Inclination. My Lord; I conceive, in such a situation [as Rector of St. Nicholas Cole-Abbey], I could do his Majesty Real Service. (32706, f. 317-8)

At the time of this letter the ministry was in disarray after the resignations and rapid reinstatements of both Newcastle and his brother Henry Pelham; the Pretender's recent advances to Manchester and Derby; and the victories of the Jacobite army at Prestonpans and Falkirk. The duke of Cumberland's final defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden was still over a month away. In such a situation Hibbins's references to the "present unnatural" rebellion in connection with his lack of reward for supporting the ministry in the "Time of the late Rebellion" cannot but have made Newcastle even more uneasy than he already was.

Hibbins must surely have connected the raising of such anxieties with the granting of his reward of the living of Esher: for when he decided that he needed more than that living could provide he reverted to the same tactics. Browning judges that Newcastle's brief tenure as prime minister, from March 1754 to November 1756, was an unmitigated disaster. By early 1756 all of his foreign policy initiatives had collapsed and Browning notes that "Newcastle expected a full-fledged French invasion ... [although Britain was virtually] without defence forces at home" (1975, 231). In fact Browning judges that things were so bad that "only in the grimmest moments of the conflicts with the Americans, Napoleon, and Hitler did the kingdom's international situation wear a severer aspect in modern times" (241). On 13th May 1756 Hibbins, perhaps sensing the duke's weakness, writes from Fobbing in considerable pique and with heavy underlinings of words:

My Lord! Your Grace seems to have forgot me, again, in the late Promotion of Ecclesiastes; and to have abandon'd me to fresh miseries. My Lord, you promis'd to allow me, 'till you could better provide for me ... I must with an honest, yet respectful, openness, declare; that I am, in no Respect, less deserving of my Royal Master's Bounty than any of the Clergymen prefer'd; tho' I am postpon'd to all of them ... I actually now do his Majesty as much Real benefit, with regard to his Military Levies, as any Private Gentleman in Britain. The Commander of his Majesty's Ship, the Princess Royal station'd here knows it. (32864, f. 548-9)

Hibbins's oblique reference to the paucity of the effort being made by the vast majority of private gentlemen to aid recruitment to the armed forces even during a time of national emergency clearly had an effect on the duke. For in his next letter of 12th August 1756 Hibbins writes: "My Lord! I am to return my dutiful thanks for fifty Pounds, your Grace was pleased to order Mr: Greening to give me, to carry me to Bath—and I do humbly thank you!" (32886, f. 434). Indeed, fifty pounds was enough to keep Hibbins nicely quiet for almost two years. But in a letter of 5th June 1758 he is on the offensive again:

My Lord! Tho' I had determin'd never to trouble your Grace again ... yet I could not foresee the extraordinary encrease of the Public Taxes, which have render'd me absolutely unable to live, without a further humble application to

your Bounty. The Bath did prolong my life, but it has increas'd my misery. Damien, who attempted to murder his Prince, never suffer'd more exquisite Torments than I daily feel ... Death—a deserv'd Death—ended his sufferings. An useful, a meritorious, tho' a Neglected life perpetuate mine! (32880, f. 331-2)

Hibbins is referring here to the career of Robert François Damiens, a “French servant who attempted to assassinate Louis XV. On 4 January 1757 ... He was seized, and nearly three months later slowly tortured to death, being finally torn to pieces by four horses” (Magnusson 1990, 381). This reference to the attempted assassination of a public figure seems again deliberately designed to increase Newcastle’s anxiety; especially as only recently, following the debacle of his premiership, Browning records that “at Greenwich, he was forced to seek refuge in the observatory when he ran afoul of the most dangerous mob he had encountered since the days of his youthful and high-spirited defence of Whiggery in 1715” (1975, 241). If this was Hibbins’s intention then it does not seem to have paid off this time, as there is no evidence that he received further money or preferment from Newcastle after 1756.

Hibbins’s most sustained attempt to pander to Newcastle’s sense of paranoia came about as a result of his involvement with another Anglican clergyman named O’Hara—a curate of Vange in Essex, only a few miles from Hibbins’s residence in Fobbing. Jeremy Black notes that during this period “Relations in the localities between Anglicans, Dissenters and Catholics were generally good” (1984, 15). But if Hibbins’s relations with Catholics and even with other clergymen are anything to go by then this judgement needs to be treated with some caution. For on 16th March 1753 Hibbins writes to inform Newcastle that: “on Wednesday last, Mr: O’Hara was found guilty, on full evidence, of drinking the profane and treasonable healths; and of the lewd and sodomitical words and actions, laid against him in Mr: attorney General’s information” (32731, f. 258). It was clearly not in Hibbins’s interests to present this conviction as a *fait accompli*; and so he goes on to hint that “it is most likely, he will endeavour to extenuate his grievous offence, by some Pretences” (f. 258). In anticipation of just such an endeavour Hibbins points out that during the course of the resolution of the case:

Weak and infirm as I am; I had evidence to prove, that when the People of this Parish, were ringing the Bells, for joy of his Royal Highness' Victory at Colloden; O'Hara—then lodging here—ran up to the belfry; damn'd and abus'd the ringers; and threaten'd to prosecute them; and when they made bonfires & illuminations the same night and hung up the Pretender in effigie; he went out and abus'd them ... [Hibbins also claims to have evidence] that he had told his landlord that, if the Rebels advanc'd he need not to be afraid; for that he (O'Hara) would protect him; for that he was very well esteem'd among them; and that, in such case, he would hire a stout fellow that could fight; mount and arm him; and go along with him and beat their head. He had declar'd, on hearing of the accident, at Falkirk; that such an other victory—as he call'd it—would make him a Bishop. (f. 258)

Slightly shadily perhaps Hibbins claims that “such kind of Evidence—if mr: attorney Generall shall think to be necessary, to answer affidavits he may trump up—I can get sworn to, by credible Persons” (f. 258). O'Hara's alleged offences—which the man himself admitted, and Hibbins accepted, were largely due to extreme drunkenness—were bad enough. But for Hibbins the worst aspect of the case (and hence the most advantageous to his own plans) is the clear existence behind it of a Catholic conspiracy. For he continues: “the Papists are a numerous, and (I am sorry, I must say it) an increasing People hereabout. 'Till O'Hara was accus'd of sedition, they despis'd, and malign'd him ... But, as soon as ever he was to be prosecuted, they flew in, to him; supported and encourag'd him; and were active in tampering with ... the king's evidence” (f. 258-9). In a further letter of 30th March 1753 Hibbins adds that “since ... all over Lord Petre's estate ... there are Numbers of Popish Priests ... who cannot fail to do great hurt among ignorant People: especially in a country where there are few, benefic'd clergy-men, resident” (32731, f. 317). Further, Hibbins has evidence that during O'Hara's trial “there were 5, if not 6 Popish Priests, planted up and down in Court; all the while Mr: Justice Clive was trying the information” (f. 317); and worst of all that: “I have been lately assur'd, by some well-wishers to the present, most happy establishment ... [that] the Papists, in, and about Billericay, seem full of expectations from abroad” (f. 317).⁹ If true this last piece of information would clearly have been of very great interest to Newcastle. But perhaps Hibbins was too often patently transparent in his intentions. For in both of these letters, as if off-hand, he makes it clear that in order to foil O'Hara and the Papists “it may be

proper for me to have a Commission, to take affidavits in the King's Bench. It won't cost above thirty shillings ..." (32731 f. 258). Hempton notes that for a clergyman of the time close involvement with the rural magistracy inevitably implied a significant rise in social status; it would thus have been of interest to Hibbins.

A few weeks later Newcastle commanded Hibbins to wait upon him in London, perhaps to discuss the various additional accusations against O'Hara. Once back in Fobbbing Hibbins writes to remind the duke that at the meeting: "it was your Grace's Pleasure to declare, 'you had a good opinion of me; that you purpos'd soon to relieve me; and commanded me to look out for something to ask of your Grace'" (32731, f. 419). But nothing came of the duke's command: perhaps because this time Hibbins had misjudged the source of Newcastle's paranoia. For Holmes and Szechi note that "after 1715 Catholic involvement in Jacobite plots and rebellions was minimal"; and that by the mid-eighteenth century "England's ruling classes no longer considered English Catholicism a threat" (1993, 90 and 91). Indeed, by 1745 Protestants were overwhelmingly dominant in Jacobite conspiracies. Perhaps one Dr von Reder, who wrote to Newcastle on 20th August 1746, had more shrewdly judged the mood of the moment. He notes that even in "the infancy of the late stupid and unnatural Rebellion, when most people of sense spoke of it with contempt" he had had his suspicions about a local schoolmaster: "I then imputed his expressions to fear and folly, but when the matter became more serious I often reflected, what secret intelligence that man could have at so early a time and began to suspect him" (32708, f. 116). In any case both Hibbins's and von Reder's attempts to shop their neighbours to the authorities, under the cloak of anonymity provided by the Post Office, well support Kenneth Ellis's description of that institution as "the centre of imperial communications ... a propaganda and intelligence organ, serving as the government's mouthpiece, eyes, and ears" (1958, viii).

That Hibbins's efforts were never entirely in vain is attested to by Bateson's claim that "no application that was addressed to [Newcastle] ... was treated as wastepaper" (1892, 687). This was partly as a result of what Holmes and Szechi identify as, after the 1720s, "a deliberate attempt to subject the Church to the Whig patronage machine ... to mould the character of the lower clergy" (1993, 103-4). The

result of this policy was that the 1750s “saw Newcastle’s influence over patronage reach its peak” (106). However, other commentators have ascribed Newcastle’s obsessive interest in maintaining control over patronage to other more personal reasons. For example Kelch notes that Newcastle “was afraid to anger, affront or disappoint anyone high or low, for he did not know when he might need these ‘friends’” (1974, 9). The relevance of this to an assessment of the relationship between Newcastle and Hibbins is revealed by the correspondence between Newcastle and Richmond. On the 27th March 1741 Richmond writes to Newcastle: “I beg you would read the enclosed which I propose to send to Hibbins, I wish it dont make him fly off; & I am sure he can hurt us. butt I can not possibly tell him a lye, & I must make him some answer ... since nothing can be done for him, ’tis butt honest to tell him so” (quoted in McCann 1984, 59). Newcastle replies on the 30th March as follows: “As to your letter to Mr Hibbins, I am farr from desiring to amuse Him, but I submit it to you, whether it is necessary at present, to tell Him so very directly, that we will do nothing for Him” (59). Such hesitancy appears strange in a man who, contemporaries believed, even after his resignation in 1756, had “the authority to choose a House of Commons” (Browning 1975, 254). However, Browning—along with many other twentieth century historians—argues that such an estimation of the duke’s authority was vastly exaggerated; in fact the “extent of the duke’s power never exceeded seventeen seats” (255). His biography of Newcastle makes a great theme of the expense and trouble Newcastle was forced to go to at almost every election in which he had an interest; which for a variety of reasons was just about every election that took place in Britain during his adult lifetime. The disparity between the appearance and the reality of the duke’s influence was ripe for exploitation; and Hibbins did not miss his chance many times to make reference to the possible influence that he might have over elections of various kinds. Nor was the duke likely to have ignored such references, for as John Cannon points out “Clergymen were highly regarded as canvassers at election time. They had usually a good working-knowledge of the district, professional excuses for visiting, experience in talking to people, and a formidable reputation for indefatigability in argument” (1984, 65). So, in reference to the events of a past election, Hibbins writes on 3rd

May 1753 that "Tho' Mr:Vyner may not be soe grateful, as he ought, to your Grace ... His majority ... was but 178; and, I beg leave to remind your Grace, I carried in 120 hollanders, on my own account ... Mr Dobbs, if living ... will attest it" (32731, f. 420). In 1748 Newcastle himself sought election to the position of Chancellor of the University of Cambridge—in place of the recently deceased duke of Somerset. However, he did so against strong competition from Frederick, the Prince of Wales. Browning notes that the duke "wanted the office keenly ... for its prestige" (1975, 171). Here again Hibbins found an opening for he writes on 19th December 1748 that "my brother, Doctor Hibbins, of Minceing Lane; whom I had engag'd, the moment I heard of the Duke of Somerset's Death; is, and always will be, ready to obey your Grace's commands, at Cambridge; he being a Master of arts, in that university" (32717, f. 491). Browning notes that Newcastle went to great lengths to mobilize all potential voters in this election and he is thus unlikely to have ignored such an offer. He duly won and spent a week of drunken celebration in Cambridge whilst he was being installed as chancellor. For such reasons as these it was never possible for the duke to ignore or to be wholly independent of men like Hibbins.

Browning judges that only in the middle of the eighteenth century "was it possible for a man like the duke, so clearly unfit for the leadership responsibilities he now assumed, to reach the pinnacle of political success" (1975, 200-01). The psychological effects of being in such a position are hinted at by Kelch:

Newcastle's need for affection and approbation is one explanation for his activities on the patronage side of political life, an area which required infinite attention, vast amounts of work and much worry on his part ... [although the duke himself] would have been incapable of writing of the satisfaction of his emotional needs through the use of patronage even if he sensed it. Contemporaries remarked repeatedly on his inability to say no to supplicants for his recommendation ... His personal need made him a willing slave to the minutiae of the eighteenth-century arts of political patronage in church and state. (1974, 11)

Hibbins attempted to exploit perceived weaknesses in Newcastle's character in a variety of ways. First of all by repeatedly questioning, by implication, the duke's own personal aristocratic credentials by alluding to what he himself expects of an

aristocrat. For example in a letter of 5th June 1752 he writes “I am so miserable an object, that were your Grace to see, you would pity me. Your Noble heart would melt at afflictions so very Great and inexpressible!” (32727, f. 345); and in a letter of 9th February 1755 that “I trust, you are too Noble, Just, and Benevolent, to suffer me to languish, and perish” (32852, f.417). Second, Hibbins many times quotes back to Newcastle his own words in inverted commas, as if in order to bind the duke to his promises all the more tightly; as in a letter of 30th October 1747: “Give me leave to remind your Grace, that it is above twenty years since you was, first, pleas’d to promise me ‘all the assistance in your Power’” (32713, f. 350).¹⁰ Third, Hibbins attempts to convince the duke that he is personally responsible for overturning the natural order of things in not recompensing him for his services in offering “my Tonge & Pen; my heart and hand ... to the ... Glorious Cause” (32713, f. 351). This complaint becomes explicit in a letter of 27th January 1755 when Hibbins for the first time reveals to Newcastle that:

I am not rais’d, by favour, to the possession I have; and so, thro’ an unsatisfy’d disposition, encrease my wants: But I am sunk into them, from an ample Paternal Fortune, of better than four times the Value of my little Living; which, had not an uncommon and unreserved zeal for the Protestant interest, and succession, carried me into expenses beyond my real abilities, would have answer’d all my own occasions, and hinder’d my present wants; without troubling your Grace, as, now, I am impelled to do. (32852, f.281)

Clearly Hibbins on the personal and psychological level had the ability to unnerve Newcastle; at least to the extent that the duke was not prepared to tell him explicitly that the vast majority of his letters were not doing his chances of preferment any good.

As well as ignoring the above reasons for Newcastle’s interest in patronage, Holmes and Szechi also imply that such patronage was co-ordinated solely in the interests of party politics. And yet Hempton argues that this is a “view of patronage quite inappropriate to eighteenth-century circumstances ... patronage was not so much a tool of party as an instrument of government” (1990, 204). In other words Newcastle and the Whigs were not seeking to create a perpetually on-message “army of political toadies” (205); but in terms of the Church at least a body of men capable

of helping to run a country that many visiting foreigners perceived as dangerously ungovernable. This idea is confirmed by Anthony Armstrong who notes that the “parish, so far from being merely a unit of local and church government, was until the nineteenth century a most intricate complex of legal obligations and property interests” (1973, 11); and by Hempton who argues that:

the Church of England was an integral and indispensable part of the theory and practice of governing ... Church and State were thus regarded as interdependent; if the one suffered damage so too did the other ... such views ... were the commonly accepted maxims of both governors and the governed in the late eighteenth century.” (1990, 203-4)

In a variety of ways Hibbins attempted to convince Newcastle that he was not in a position to carry out his duties in respect of the above compact between Church and State; no doubt with the intention of making the duke anxious to the point that he was prepared to alter Hibbins’s condition for the better. He did so by attempting to cut as lamentable figure as possible in his letters in order to worry the duke about what the common people would be thinking of him. So, in a letter of 30th March 1753 he writes that: “I am greatly disabl’d, by illnesses; and kept under by low circumstances ... I am such a cripple ... I was forc’d to be carry’d to Chelmsford, t’other day, mostly, in a cart” (32731, f. 318). In another letter he wails: “O! my Lord, Duke! A poor Gentleman—render’d such by serving the Government; and who, notwithstanding, was prepar’d to meet the Common Enemy, and dye like a true Briton—must, now perish like a Pultroon!” (32861, f. 15); and in yet another that he is “a cripple reduc’d, to crutches; and in danger of losing one of my eyes” (32733, f. 433). In several letters Hibbins’s otherwise neat handwriting has deteriorated very visibly, to a thin and shaking spidery scrawl. At such times the tone of his letters rises towards a crescendo of aggrieved self pity—as in a letter of 5th June 1752:

I beseech your Grace’s Pardon for presuming to address your Grace otherwise than by Memorial: But, indeed, my most honour’d Lord, I am unable to draw one. I have been at Death’s Door this month past under the excruciating pains of Gout in my Stomach and Rheumatism in my limbs, and thrice was I given over for Dead! happy as to my own Part—had I really Dyed! ... O! My Good Lord! ... relieve your poor servant! ... Let the healthy, and young; the

Noviciates, and untry'd; wait only one Remove more; while your Grace does a Charity to an old, well try'd Servant ... For God's sake, then, my Good Lord Duke; For pity's sake; and for that of a poor distress'd family ... relieve me! ... I throw my self at your feet! I implore your Grace's mercy! (32727, f. 345-6)

Hibbins was clearly in no state to minister to his parishioners at this point. Evans notes that throughout the eighteenth century "huge numbers of ordained men remained well short of the material comfort which was an essential pre-requisite for social respectability in eighteenth-century England" (1987, 222). And it was in the acquisition of such comforts that Hibbins saw the solution to many of his problems. In a letter of 24th July 1752 he writes: "I have been accustomed, in my younger years, to use wine, and could well afford it: yet now, in the decline of Life, and when my infirmities doe absolutely require it, I can not afford to purchase it" (32728, f. 360). In another letter he petitions for the chaplainship of the Savoy as: "here will be a house to live in, and be near advice in the Winter; and, by an assurance of my life, I may borrow some money to carry me to Bath, to perfect that Cure, your Grace's Goodness and Generosity caused me to hope, and rendered probable" (32858, f. 271). Gibson does not explain why Hibbins spent so much of his time in Fobbing (in Essex) when the duke had presented him to a living in Esher (in Surrey). Perhaps the mystery can be explained by the fact that several times Hibbins writes that he is too ill to carry out his duties but also too poor to pay the unlucky curate that he has hired in his stead.¹¹ In such case it is unlikely that the duke's granting of the material favours that Hibbins asked for would have improved his relations with his parishioners; many of whom, as Evans points out, were aware of the stereotype of clergymen as "idle, worldly, avaricious and increasingly likely to absent themselves from their country livings in pursuit of fashionable pleasures in London and the leisure centres of provincial England [such as Bath]" (1987, 236).

Hibbins did not leave it to Newcastle to guess the connection between his poverty and the state of his relations with his parishioners. In the first letter that has survived to the duke this subject is clearly a source of some embarrassment to Hibbins and is perhaps a result of his perceived 'oddness.' In this letter he writes to explain "some unhappy misunderstandings, on this side the Countrey; which took their Rise, wholly, from personal Resentment; and are unworthy your Grace's

Knowledge”; as a result of which “I may have been represented, in a different light, to your Grace” (32696, f. 27). However, as the correspondence progresses Hibbins takes no pains to disprove, at least in his own case, what Evans notes: “One may infer ... that the clergy did not actively antagonise their parishioners in the first half of the eighteenth century” (1987, 236). As an addendum to his involvement in the O’Hara case, Hibbins writes on 9th February 1755 of:

my conduct on some late occasions ... Wherein, tho’ numberless sarcasms have been thrown out, to provoke me—tho’ my late zeal for his majesty’s honour has been represented as too particular ... and it has been more than insinuated, that no Public Notice has been taken of it, from above, was an evidence that it was not well received there ... Yet they have lost their effect; having not been able to engage me to act inconsistently with my dutiful professions of a singular devotion to your grace. (32852, f. 416-7)

In the same letter Hibbins reports that “others, again, have pretended to compliment me on my Dutiful Behaviour ... and even offer’d to introduce, a Petition to the Royal Highness, the Duke ... I absolutely refus’d the offer: took all opportunitys of proclaiming the late instance of your Grace’s Generous Compassion for me” (f. 417). Again, in the letter of 13 May 1756 detailing the good work that Hibbins claims to have done in recruiting men onto the *Princess Royal*, he claims that “my Lord, these things being publicly known; and yet I am neglected, give bad impressions among the People and rise to much invective” (32864, f. 548). The receipt of such letters as these must have made Newcastle uneasy as to the balance that he was striking between keeping the Anglican Church at heel and destroying its power over the people entirely. After all, during the course of the period that Hibbins was writing his letters Holmes and Szechi refer to the existence of “Two ineffectual archbishops of Canterbury in succession, Potter and Herring, in the twenty years from 1737 to 1757”; whose combined effect on the Church was “less than ruinous, but not much less” (1993, 108). Too, the influence of Methodism and of evangelicalism in general, at the time, causes Langford to ask: “Why was [the Church] ... unable to develop that unifying sense of missionary zeal which would have enabled it to take full advantage of the religious impulse of Georgian England, in the process becoming truly a national church?” (1989, 258). Given the state of Hibbins’s relations with his

neighbours it is likely that the people of Fobbing would have been very easy targets for the field-preaching tactics of the Methodists.

The letters considered in this chapter make up only a tiny fraction of the correspondence addressed to Newcastle, often sent by people no less poor and forlorn than Hibbins. However, there does seem to be something exceptional about Hibbins's letters. Indeed Gibson judges that he "struggled on in his applications to stand out as a unique supplicant in the eighteenth-century Church but one who does not necessarily deserve our opprobrium but our understanding" (1991, 92). To my mind this exceptionality is a result of the complex imagination of an epistolary space, in which he could approach and make claims on Newcastle, that Hibbins was forced into as a result of his relationship with a man who "never learned the art of the simple negative" (Browning 1975, 83). This epistolary space acted as a direct alternative to the aristocratic levee. Most people would have given up soon after they found themselves trapped inside a system of patronage that Bishop Warburton described as Newcastle's 'ecclesiastical lottery.' Hibbins never did. His last letter contains only another request for "one of the smaller Prebends ... [or] some lay Office that may help my Poor Wife when I am no more—or some of his Majesty's Bounty, dispos'd under your Grace's care" (32881, f. 230). After this letter Gibson finds no more trace of Hibbins and assumes that he died quietly somewhere before the duke acted to help him. All that now remains of a remarkably shadowy figure are his letters. Bruce Redford notes that "At its most successful ... epistolary discourse ... fashions a distinctive world at once internally consistent, vital, and self-supporting" (1986, 9). Newcastle can rarely have been in any doubt as to the inescapable world that he was about to enter as soon as he caught sight of one of Hibbins's letters, marked as they usually were on the outside with a brief phrase such as "Mr Hibbins's Memorial." This world in fact presents the letter reader with a microcosm of the relations between church and state in the mid-eighteenth century. Moreover, the proliferation of imaginations of epistolary spaces represented by Hibbins's many letters to Newcastle—and by the imaginations of others such as Mary Evans—paves the way for Richardson's fictionalisation of *Clarissa Harlowe's* flight into her own massively elaborated version of just such a space.

REFERENCES

¹ William Gibson describes Hibbins as “a shadowy figure, not appearing in the standard biographical reference works” (1991, 92).

² All quotations from letters to the duke are taken from the Newcastle Correspondence in the British Library; and followed by manuscript and folio numbers in brackets.

³ The reckless extravagance of Newcastle’s aristocratic lifestyle is hinted at in the rapid failure of a trust that was set up in 1738 in order to curb his expenditure. As Browning notes, “within months of the creation of the trust the duke was arguing that, whatever the consequences for the policy of retrenchment, he could not part with—of all things—his pineapple trees at Claremont” (1975, 126).

⁴ All extracts from this letter are taken from the Hardwicke Papers in the British Library; and followed by manuscript and folio numbers in brackets.

⁵ Further impeding Hibbins’s pursuit of a living were the deaths of his two main supporters, the duke of Ancaster (in 1742) and Lord Monson (in 1748). Another man who sometimes supported his claims was the duke of Richmond but he too died inconveniently early for Hibbins (in 1750).

⁶ If Hibbins himself is to be believed then he was in a very poor financial situation even after taking over the living of Esher. In a letter of 1st March 1756 he complains that: “A Physician at three Guineas a Journey—my Apothecary seven and sixpence, every turn—and a constant Curate to pay (besides the medicines & maintenance of my poor family) was quite an overmatch for my very slender income!” (32863, f. 163).

⁷ Holmes and Szechi note that the: “low level of *personal* violence in the overwhelming majority of disorders before the 1790s is a ... tribute to the discipline of the mobs ... Even in London there was only one possible but unconfirmed fatality in 1710; none in 1715-16” (1993, 179).

⁸ Newcastle was born in 1693 and in one letter of 1755 Hibbins describes himself as “a poor diseas’d, man, of above sixty!” (32852, f. 282). Their contemporaneity was a happy circumstance that Hibbins was quick to attempt to make use of, for in a letter of 5th June 1758 he writes: “My Lord! Your Grace grows into years; and, consequently, can judge somewhat—I hope you never will probe more circumstantialy—what my infelicity is” (32880, f. 331).

⁹ In his first letter about the O’Hara case Hibbins piles the pressure on to Newcastle by identifying the existence of a second, although unrelated, Catholic conspiracy. To combat it he again recommends “a former Request [that] when the Poor laws come to be amended, Popish farmers may be oblig’d to pay a moderate fine, instead of having Protestant apprentices put to them, by the Parish; and that fine go to the Protestant Farmer as a compensation for taking this child out of turn. Else so many poor Children will be seduc’d to Popery; or many, little, farmers turn Papists for the exemption. For we are determin’d, here, not to let the Papists have them, on any consideration” (32731, f. 259).

¹⁰ Hibbins was not alone in using these tactics. On 29th March 1756 Arthur Collins wrote to the Duke hoping for a cash payment of £200 in order to pay his rent, taxes, and the wages of an “Amenuensis to assist me”; he concludes his letter as follows: “All the nobility I have waited on seem astonish’d that your Grace will do nothing for

me, who have wrote in favour of the Administration ... What I have wrote will make my Name memble [*sic*] to after Ages; and don't let it be said, that you suffer'd me to live in a starving condition" (32864, f. 95-6).

¹¹ Roy Porter terms such functionaries "cut-price curates ... [who] got 'leavings' not 'livings'" (1990, 172).

CHAPTER SIX. CLARISSA'S CYBERSPACE: IMAGINATIONS OF EPISTOLARY SPACE IN RICHARDSON'S *CLARISSA*

*Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls;
For, thus friends absent speak.
from John Donne's 'To Sir Henry Wotton' (1971, 214)*

*An odd thought strikes me: we shall receive no letters in the grave.
Dr. Johnson to Boswell in The Life of Samuel Johnson (quoted in Birkbeck Hill
1887, IV: 413)*

In her consideration of the last moments of the heroine of *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747-8), Terry Castle notes that: "Ironically, Clarissa is writing much during her last days—letters, her will, scriptural meditations" (1982, 126). There is surely an irony in the detection of irony here. For at no point during Samuel Richardson's massive epistolary novel has Clarissa shown any inclination to stop writing. She writes when she believes she has no-one to write to; when she is mad; when she is in prison; and even in anticipation of her own death, so that the part of the novel that post-dates this event need not be unduly deprived of her voice. Like all of the other letter writers considered in this thesis, then, she finds the strength to write letters in even the most adverse of circumstances. The irony that Castle detects exists only in the light of her own argument that as she dies, "Clarissa ... is everywhere using language to comment on the breakdown of language ... the impossibility of 'Story'-telling" (127). If such a usage were much in evidence then this would indeed make Clarissa the precocious poststructuralist Castle would have her—consciously overturning the theory that language offers the possibility of transcendent meaning many years before the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida. Clarissa would then indeed be isolated and broken at the end, deprived even of the pleasure of writing letters. But again Castle is forced to the admission that: "Paradoxically ... following on her recovery from the mad 'Fit'—[Clarissa] ... appears to those around her as a more powerful speaker and writer than ever" (121). Castle accounts for this "paradox" only in terms of "Lovelace's own weakening" (123). But what about Clarissa? Is there really only irony and paradox

in what Richardson himself refers to in his “Postscript” to the novel as “the triumphant death of CLARISSA” (1498)?¹

In this chapter I argue that there is not; and that it is Clarissa’s imagination of a series of epistolary spaces that constitutes triumph over Lovelace. These spaces will be seen as analogous to what is nowadays labelled cyberspace; and as modelled on an ideal version of the new urban space of London that Clarissa encounters soon after she has escaped from her family at Harlowe Place. The triumph of her imagination of epistolary spaces would not have been possible without a firm belief, strengthening even as the novel closes, in the possibility of stories being told through the language of letters. This chapter is split into four parts. In the first and second sections I describe the state of almost perpetual written communication within which Clarissa and many other of the characters in *Clarissa* attempt to live; and detail the inherent instabilities of such states, which are by nature subject to frequent breakdowns in meaning. In the last two sections I argue—as poststructuralist and other critics never do—that the destination of both Clarissa and *Clarissa* offers a solution to these breakdowns in experience of the shared communities of meaning of London and of epistolary space. Both of these communities, specifically in their connection to the “holy city” of the biblical book of Revelation, offer Clarissa the hope of a language carrying enough meaning to transcend the pathetic situation in which Lovelace has left her.

Clarissa’s “good eight hours a day”

The close of *Clarissa* can be seen to offer a nascent vision of what Jean Baudrillard describes as “the smooth operational surface of communication” (1983, 127). After all, in response to the sheer volume of letters contained in *Clarissa* P. W. K. Stone notes that: “Clarissa, it has been calculated, must at certain points in her career have scratched away with her pen for a good eight hours a day” (1961, 12). Baudrillard’s description of our media-age as an “era of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface” (1983, 127) has been much discussed. Particularly

controversial is his argument that today the various media have reached a level of saturation whereby:

from now on signs will exchange among themselves exclusively, without interacting with the real (and they only exchange themselves among themselves smoothly, they only exchange themselves perfectly *on the condition* that they no longer exchange themselves with the real). (1988, 125)

In response to the extremism of such statements—surely we have not yet reached such a level of media saturation—Douglas Kellner argues that “while Baudrillard’s texts are arguably quite good science fiction, they are rather problematical as models of social theory” (1989, 203). What I want to do here is merely to use some of Baudrillard’s terms in order to illuminate the way in which Clarissa’s and Lovelace’s experiences of mediated communication (by means of the letter) are different. My use will take into account Kellner’s criticism of what he describes as Baudrillard’s “technophobia and ... nostalgia for face-to-face conversation which he privileges ... over debased and abstract media communication” (67). In contrast, Kellner puts forward a vision which is more complex and offers “the possibility of ‘responsible’ or ‘emancipatory’ media communication” (67).

To begin, Baudrillard’s description of the “promiscuity that reigns over the communication networks” (1983, 131) cannot fail to resonate with the dense complexity of a reading of Richardson’s novel; exemplified as it is by the laborious cross-referencing of editor Angus Ross’s “Table of Letters” and “Table of Letter Numbers in Other Editions.” True, Baudrillard is speaking not of letter and postal system but rather of a world of “screen and network” (126). But some of the consequences of what he describes are similar; although perhaps on a lesser scale or with less intensity. Linda Harasim draws attention to this similarity when she notes without making exceptions that “historically, the introduction of new communication tools has transformed humanity” (1993a, 3). So although the exact nature of the transformations undergone may be different, the fact of transformation itself is a constant. *Clarissa* is perhaps the first fictional representation of such a transformation; and of its effects both positive and negative. Not only do the protagonists of this novel have at their disposal—as a result of the various

technological advances in the workings of the Post Office, detailed earlier—a now relatively mature “post, general and penny” (817); but many of them go to great lengths to ensure that their own letters are carried privately—and so with ever greater efficiency and speed.² Characteristically, Lovelace takes this tendency to the greatest extreme in his desperation to be the first to hear news of Clarissa’s failing health. He describes to his arch-confidante Belford:

what pains I am at to dispatch messengers; who are constantly on the road to meet each other, and one of them to link in the chain with a fourth, whose station is in London and five miles onward, or till met. (957)

Not even the Post Office could rival the profligate spending necessary in order to maintain such a relay; albeit Lovelace only has to maintain communication between Belford and himself. Again, in respect of Clarissa’s letter writing Anthony Kearney may complain that “Clarissa’s later letters tend to lack the dramatic power of the earlier ones” (1975, 18), but it is only towards the end of the novel that Clarissa has the power to avoid drama; the power to send and receive letters in peace to and from whomsoever she pleases; even the power to peruse her tormentor Lovelace’s letters against his will, courtesy of the reformed Belford. She is able to do these things because she has access in London at the end of the novel to the sorts of communication technologies whose later developments and consequences for human behaviour would be documented by Baudrillard.

What might be some of the effects of existence in such a state of almost constant communication? In the words of Edward Barrett a “profound revolution in communication ... [entails] revolutionary change in our forms of expression, thought, and being” (1996, xi). At the end of *Clarissa*, however, only Clarissa—and not Lovelace—sits in a form of this revolutionary state: having almost literally crawled to a boarding house at the bawling centre of London, the busy flower and vegetable market of Covent Garden. There, like a spider at the centre of her web, she finally indulges in the sort of uninhibited communication the promise of which had been one of her prime original reasons for allowing herself to be carried to London: early on Anna Howe had advised her that, “There, as in the centre, you’ll be in the way of

hearing from everybody and sending to anybody" (467). In fact, she imagines a series of epistolary spaces between herself and all those characters in the novel who have been consistently sympathetic to her predicament. And in so doing she achieves a level of serenity that she has never before known: the very mingling of souls promised by John Donne in the first epigraph to this chapter. As for Lovelace, towards the end of the novel *he* retreats far to the west of London: first to M. Hall in Berkshire and then to Uxbridge, where he corresponds only with Belford. Finally, Lovelace indulges in a last curt exchange of letter of challenge and letter of acceptance of challenge with Colonel Morden; and his death is reported to Belford in the translated letter of the otherwise unknown F. J. De la Tour. Surprisingly then—given his earlier penchant for setting up his own private postal services and his undoubted enthusiasm for letter writing—at the end of *Clarissa* Lovelace seems to have undergone no revolutionary change of thought or being; instead he merely reverts back to the old aristocratic and rakish etiquettes of duelling.

But this is to say little about that revolutionary state in which Clarissa finds herself as she lies on her deathbed in rooms above the Smiths' shop in Covent Garden. Baudrillard is clear about the nature of the new era of communication that he describes. He notes that in his earlier "critique of the object as obvious fact, substance, reality, use value" (1983, 126), two logics interfered with each other: those of psychoanalysis and sociology. In turn, these logics projected or imagined sexuality and power onto objects; and saw the "consumption [of objects] as the production of signs, differentiation, status and prestige" (126). To be clear: "the object was taken as sign, but as sign still heavy with meaning" (126). In this way Baudrillard attempted a Marxist dissection of commodity culture. In his later works all of this has, as a result of media saturation, disappeared to be replaced only with:

the transference and obscenity of the universe of communication, which leaves far behind it those relative analyses of the universe of the commodity. All functions abolished in a single dimension, that of communication. That's the ecstasy of communication. (131)

In such a universe all possibility of reference to the real vanishes: "as soon as behaviour is crystallized on certain screens and operational terminals, what's left

appears only as a large, useless body ... The real itself appears as a large useless body" (129). It appears to be the promise of a similar universe that attracts Clarissa to London. Once in London she gradually divests herself of surplus clothes and possessions, yet all the time writing to distant others—in effect she moves willingly towards existence in Baudrillard's "single dimension." In a letter to Lovelace, Belford reports Clarissa as saying of her friend Anna that she looks forward to a time when, "divested of the shades of body, shall we be all light and all mind—Then how unalloyed, how perfect, will be our friendship!" (1348). There Baudrillard's tainted and tainting conception of the nature of the object would be transformed: for, as Clarissa says, "Our love then will have one and the same adorable object, and we shall enjoy it and each other to all eternity!" (1348). Of course this is a religious vision; but it is my argument that Clarissa achieves a nascent version of this state whilst still alive and in London. True, her last letter to Anna seems deliberately to emphasize the awkward presence of her sick body. Belford tells us that: "she would fain write if she could: and she tried; but to no purpose" (1348). Failing this, Clarissa dictates the letter to Mrs Lovick managing herself only to write the "blessing and subscription" (1349). These last are written by Clarissa with Mrs Lovick "forced to guide her hand" (1349) and are seen in the text as follows: "*God for ever bleſs you! prays, dropt on my bended Knees, altho' ſupported upon them, Your Grateful, Obligated, Affectionate, Clar. Harlowe*" (1349). As much as the italicization of this blessing and signature remind us of Clarissa's weak and ailing body, they remind us more of the absence, and therefore of the need for textual representation, of that body. They further remind us that all we know of the connection between Anna and Clarissa (Clarissa exclaims, "How uninterruptedly sweet and noble has been our friendship!" (1348)) has been in the realm of light and mind already: for in the course of the whole novel the two never once meet (unlike Lovelace and Belford, who meet on numerous occasions). We might then ask what level of interaction with the real such a friendship conducted by correspondence could ever have had.

It is Clarissa's desire for existence in the single dimension of communication, in avoidance of the grand and mercenary plans that the Harlowes have for her, that Anna Howe draws attention to in her very first letter to Clarissa: "you ... so desirous,

as you always said, of sliding through life to the end of it unnoted ... not wishing to be observed even for your silent benevolence; sufficiently happy in the noble consciousness which rewards it" (39-40). The nature of Clarissa's shared but silent consciousness of her "benevolence" surely hints at the revolutionary state of being of which Barrett speaks: a kind of escape for her from certain aspects of the real. Throughout the novel Clarissa's lament to Anna has been that: "when I can do nothing else, constant use has made me able to write. Long, very long, has that been all my amusement and pleasure" (371). It is thus not that Clarissa delights in her letters as the bare presentation of the sordid facts of her handling by the greedy Harlowes and the rapacious Lovelace; but rather that she draws solace from the act of representation itself. It is surely not too much of an exaggeration to say that she aspires to a world of pure communication: it is just seemingly ironic that she comes as close as she ever will to such a state in the resolutely commercial and worldly environment of Covent Garden. Letter writing offers Clarissa an escape from on the one hand, "the chess-game of competitive asset winning" engaged in by the Harlowes (Ross 1985, 20); and on the other from the "field for stratagem and contrivance" (147) laid down by Lovelace. It is perhaps for this reason that, just after her initial kidnap, Clarissa promises Anna that: "I am busying myself to give you the particulars at large. The whole twenty-four hours of each day (to begin the moment I can fix) shall be employed in it till it is finished" (370). Here, the ability to escape into letter writing is seized upon as a chance to calm nerves and to avoid the presence of "this interrupting man" (370). It is thus misguided for P. W. K. Stone to dismiss the epistolary form of *Clarissa* as "liable to savour ... of the laboured and artificial" in that letters therein are "motivated by nothing more convincing than a perpetual urge in their characters to write" (1961, 11). It is also necessary to ask from where this "perpetual urge" arises.

In Baudrillard the source of what Stone terms a "perpetual urge" lies at the heart of the ecstasy of communication. Brian Loader notes that for Baudrillard:

media communications technologies have been responsible in the past for hiding reality behind a veil of signs, images and symbols ... The immense persuasiveness of such media have contributed to the condition of what he

describes as the “ecstasy of communication”: an environment composed of simulations of images which have no base in reality: a “hyperreality.” (1997, 10-11)

In other words just such a form of bodiless communication as is desired by Clarissa is condemned by Baudrillard for its contribution to “the ex-termination ... of the real of signification ... commutability of the beautiful and the ugly in fashion, of the Left and the Right in politics, of the true and the false in every message” (1988, 128). Baudrillard sees such a state as all-pervasive in the late twentieth century; but in the mid-eighteenth century few would be in such states of perpetual communication as Anna and Clarissa. Not surprising, then, that the two do seem at times to succumb to flashes of “hyperreality”—one down-side of the revolutionary state in which they live. Most noticeably this occurs when, before Clarissa has been kidnapped, she and Anna briefly turn Lovelace into what can be seen as a cartoon version of a rake. Later on, Clarissa accuses Lovelace of writing her “an ecstatic answer” (356); but the letter that Anna sends to Clarissa when she thinks that she has discovered Lovelace’s intention to seduce “His pretty Betsy, his Rosebud” (284) far more readily qualifies for the attentions of such an epithet. On this occasion Anna writes:

Now!—Ah! poor girl!—who knows what? But just turned of seventeen! ... They say she is innocent even yet! ... Ah! the poor young lover!—Ah! the poor simple girl! ... Ah! my sweet friend! ... A vile wretch! ... Oh my dear, the girl’s undone!—must be undone! The man, you know, is LOVELACE. (284-5)

Anna’s image of Lovelace’s “villainous paws” (284) and of “another disguised rake or two” (284) lurking in the bushes drives Clarissa almost to distraction. She replies, “You incense, alarm and terrify me, at the same time! Hasten ... hasten to me, what further intelligence you can gather about this vilest of men! ... I long to hear the result of your intelligence ... as soon as possible” (285-6). At this point the correspondence speeds up, so that these two letters and the following one from Anna are dated “Thursday night, March 30”, “Friday, three o’clock”, and “Friday noon, March 31”. One is thus uncomfortably reminded of Lovelace’s desire for almost instant answers to his letters in order that his stratagems be realised; a trait which he has in common

with the devilish Valmont in Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, who also takes pains to set up "a relay in case of necessity" (1961, 240). Here, Clarissa's and Anna's correspondence gathers towards an ecstatic momentum of its own, so that images and simulations of images (Anna certainly did not *see* Lovelace's "villainous paws" reaching out towards Betsy) proliferate out of control. However, in the third letter (dated Friday noon) Anna writes: "Justice obliges me to forward this after my last, on the wings of the wind ... I really believe the man is innocent" (286). And this is the check on any aspect of Baudrillard's "hyperreality" coming into being for long: the common sense of justice and responsibility that Anna and Clarissa share: the base in reality. This base is resolutely signalled at the close of the novel by Clarissa's presence in the meek and honest Smiths' house in Covent Garden. Clarissa does not allow the medium through which she writes to Anna to control her, but rather the reverse. The possibility of such agency is at the heart of Kellner's criticisms of Baudrillard's pessimistic theories of the media: "his erasure of materiality" (1989, 203). So, at this point Clarissa carefully admonishes "Hasty censors" (287) and slows down the pace of her correspondence with Anna, if only ever so slightly. More significantly, at a stroke Lovelace's cartoon dimensions are cut down to size and he again becomes that lifelike figure, the real ambiguity of which provoked Castle to ask: "whose letters—Clarissa's or Lovelace's—do we read sympathetically ...?" (1982, 28).³

The hyperreality at the heart of the ecstasy of communication can also be seen at work in the correspondence between Lovelace and Belford. For example, as Clarissa's death approaches Lovelace's letters to Belford become increasingly "hyperreal"—with Belford complaining that: "I cannot write so fast as you expect" (1332). Here, it is as if the medium has run away with Lovelace. The process culminates in the letter Lovelace writes to Belford after he has learnt that Clarissa has finally died, his "brain ... all boiling like a caldron over a fiery furnace" (1385). Therein Lovelace explains that he wants Clarissa "opened and embalmed" (1383); and that: "I will have possession of her dear heart this very night; and let Tomkins provide a proper receptacle and spirits, till I can get a golden one made for it" (1384). At this point Lovelace appears to have lost all touch with reality, any conception of

the difference between right and wrong. Such insane imagery only gradually disappears from his letters; and only over the course of continued correspondence with the reformed Belford. At first, Lovelace's recovery takes the form of mad proselytizing: "Excellent creature! ... an angel! ... my blessed charmer! ... Exalted creature! ... Heavenly aspirer! ... Matchless woman! ... Divine prophetess!" (1428-9); and then, briefly, of resumed bravado. But in his penultimate letter Lovelace comes to a more measured sense of the nature of his own regret—and of his "ingratitude to the most excellent of women ... yet all the while enabled to distinguish and to adore her excellencies, in spite of the mean opinion of the sex which I had imbibed from early manhood" (1481). It is significant that this penultimate letter is addressed from Linz, because Belford had decided to alter the nature of his correspondence with Lovelace when he wrote that: "I do not think I ought to communicate with you, as I used to do, on this side the Channel" (1436). Belford creates moral distance here—but also distance in time. The result is that Lovelace's fevered imaginations are given less opportunity to develop: thus forcing him to spend less time in his own hyperreal version of epistolary space and more time in reality.

Again, of another letter, Belford writes that when Lovelace receives it he will finally understand that Clarissa is about to die. And then, ironically, he writes:

I say, *when thou receivest it*; for I will delay it for some little time, lest thou shouldst take it into thy head (under pretence of resenting the disappointment her letter must give thee) to molest her again. (1250)

In this way, the movement from the hyperreal to the real is aided by various ways of slowing down the pace of the correspondence between Lovelace and Belford; and motivated primarily by Belford's reformation. (In Baudrillard's era of communication any such slowing down is much less easy: the telephone, the fax machine, and the Internet allow no escape from the increasingly attractive hyperreal). Without Belford there is always the sense that Lovelace would slip back into "hyperreality" at a second's notice. For example, he uses an intercepted letter of Anna Howe's in much the same way that Frank (played by Dennis Hopper) in David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet* uses a portable oxygen tank and mask: as a stimulus to

emotional violence. So at one point—on the brink of giving in to remorse and setting Clarissa free to join Anna—Lovelace quickly tells Belford: “*I break off, to re-peruse some of Miss Howe’s virulence*” (701). Then once more Anna becomes to Lovelace “the little fury ... this virago” (752). Thus in his ability to persuade himself by media Lovelace affirms Baudrillard’s malign vision; in her ability to control media Clarissa argues against its excesses.

Clarissa versus Poststructuralism

In a recent newspaper article J.G. Ballard implies that the Hollywood film has now become the archetype of the hyperreal, “has managed to plug itself directly into the limbic system of the planetary brain, the power-centre of our most visceral emotions, bypassing the frontal lobes altogether.”⁴ In place of “the hard-edged Warner movies of the 1930s and 1940s, [Hollywood] finally gave way to a fantasy world that played on dreams of luxury and upward mobility.” Why might this be?—and why are Hollywood films so successful if they have “lost touch with their audience’s fantasies”? Ballard notes that: “in a commodity culture every manufacturer tries to ensure that his products appeal across the social spectrum, and American life has broadly satisfied that goal.” In contrast, as I have shown, instances of hyperreality in letters between Clarissa and Anna—and even between Lovelace and Belford—are always dragged back at some point towards reality. In fact, none of the letters in *Clarissa* has any need to “appeal across the social spectrum”: for like Merteuil and Valmont in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the regular correspondents in *Clarissa* figuratively as well as literally *correspond*. Whatever their many differences, Anna and Clarissa basically agree upon what constitutes the meaning of a word like “prudence” (40); whereas Merteuil and Valmont agree upon the connotations of the word “pleasure” and upon what is and what is not “amusing” (1961, 195). For this reason I draw attention to Kellner’s clarification that:

although some deconstructionists—Rorty’s ‘strong textualists’—seem to take literally Derrida’s *bon mot* that ‘there is nothing outside of the text,’ and thus deny the possibility of reference altogether, other poststructuralists read

Derrida and deconstruction as problematizing questions of meaning and reference but not necessarily obliterating these domains. (1989, 90-1)

Baudrillard's is one of those forms of poststructuralism which takes Derrida literally; and it is out of such a poststructuralism that his pessimistic postmodern vision of the media and of communications technologies emerges.

At this point a parallel opens up with what current theorists are saying about the effects and nature of cyberspace on the one hand; and with the area in *Clarissa* which I term epistolary space on the other. Loader draws attention to:

the idea that cyberspace is in some sense a manifestation of the postmodern world [aiding and abetting] ... cultural transformations which [Jean-François] Lyotard characterizes as the discreditation of the "grand" or "meta-narratives" which define modernity ... [to be] replaced by "little narratives" which invoke the creative, playful and self-defining validation of local discourse which has no reference to claims of external scientific universality. (1997, 8)

These "little narratives" are at once familiar to the reader of *Clarissa*: Lovelace and Belford themselves take pride in the obscure "Roman style" (142) that they have, over time and many letters, forged. Also familiar are the fantastical grand narratives of most Hollywood movies which, according to Loader, have steadily adhered to the out-dated doctrines of modernity. But most important: according to this definition the e-mail found in cyberspace—and tracking back, the correspondence found in epistolary space—would appear to adhere to Loader's optimistic postmodernity in its "self-defining validation of local discourse." Then to return to Baudrillard: for him the ecstasy of communication entails that "All secrets, spaces and scenes [are] abolished in a single dimension of information. That's obscenity" (1983, 131). This is to argue against the possibility of the self-definition that Loader argues makes what is commonly found in cyberspace inherently postmodern. True, what Baudrillard terms obscenity is exactly what Lovelace does—"an extermination of interstitial and protective spaces" (Baudrillard 1983, 131)—when he intercepts and even annotates letters that Clarissa and Anna have taken great pains to keep private: setting Dorcas Wykes "making extracts according to former directions, from these cursed letters, for my use" (632). In effect Lovelace here makes the postmodern (according to Loader)

poststructural (according to Baudrillard), turns the private into the public. Baudrillard, however, never allows for the possibility of the defeat of the Lovelaces of the world; or for the triumph of the Clarissas in preserving their interstitial and protective spaces.

Before going any further it is necessary to justify the assertion made in the previous paragraph: that for the purposes of this piece there is no difference between an e-mail exchange taking place in cyberspace and a letter correspondence taking place in epistolary space. And so I shall outline and hopefully counter three levels of objection that might be made to such an assertion. First, that the text no longer has any body in the case of e-mail. True, but that is not here part of my concern as I am only interested in applying what has been said about e-mail and cyberspace to letters and the postal network and not the other way round. Second, Barrett argues that in "cyberspace ... the concept of text is no longer fixed but fluid" (1996, xi). But this is also true to some extent in the case of a letter: as any statement in a letter is subject to clarification, discussion, and perhaps even alteration in later letters. Third, a group of objections which might be termed quantitative rather than qualitative. For instance in cyberspace, "because of multiple interconnections, repairs and upgrading go unnoticed since the network automatically finds alternative routes of transmission" (Buick and Jevtic 1995, 127). In the history of the letter's place in literature such technologies would indeed have proved invaluable. In *Romeo and Juliet* the vital letter that Friar Laurence sends to Romeo would not have been held up with Friar John in a plague house and ultimately never received, so precipitating the tragedy; but, rather, would have found an alternative route. It is certainly true that correspondence is much less likely to be lost in cyberspace than in the postal network. But Clarissa and Lovelace have access to infinitely better postal services than Friar Laurence and Romeo. Despite the level of correspondence in *Clarissa* no letter does go astray simply through the incompetence of the postal services. Certainly, many of Clarissa and Anna's letters are deliberately and maliciously intercepted: but there are presumably also ways of doing the same in cyberspace—as witness current governmental concerns about the threat of cyber attack.⁵ Again, it is true that much of the usually level-headed Juliet's debilitating impatience to hear

from Romeo would have been quietened if she had had access to better communication technologies—as when she complains of the slowness of the Nurse in delivering messages:

Had she affections and warm youthful blood,
 She would be as swift in motion as a ball.
 My words would bandy her to my sweet love,
 And his to me. (2.5.12-15)

Compare this with Joanna Buick and Zoran Jevtic's description of powerful communications devices which, "At nearly twenty four million oscillations each second ... can perform millions of calculations per second" (1995, 87), and clearly the earlier invention of such technologies would have answered Juliet's dreams. And yet such quantitative differences do not invalidate the application of what has been said about e-mail and cyberspace to letters: for they do not represent essential differences. Indeed the worlds of cyberspace and e-mail, and of the postal network and letters, have much in common. Like imaginations of epistolary space, "networlds are based on asynchronous, not real-time communication" (Harasim 1993b, 23). And after all—in terms of communication between human and human—any technology that works faster than the speed of human thought is next to useless.

To return to *Clarissa*. It is precisely the internal coherence and self-definition of the "little narrative" that constitutes Clarissa's and Anna's correspondence (what Brian Loader, through Lyotard, would define as its postmodernism), that makes it so hard to agree with the poststructuralism of Terry Castle: especially when she would have us believe that Clarissa's death comes about as a result of the fact that she "becomes conscious of the instability of signifying codes, and [of] her own folly in seeking out transcendent meaning in the texts of this world" (1982, 118). Of course, "the politics of meaning" (164) do allow Lovelace and the Harlowes to trick and to lie to Clarissa; but the letters that Clarissa and Anna continuously exchange both before and after her kidnap and rape clearly demonstrate their own involvement in this politics. It is an involvement that the Harlowes implicitly accept when, in turn, they refuse to enter into correspondence with Clarissa, as "of writing to so ready a scribbler there will be no end" (257). To make her case Castle ignores a great deal of

the evidence that is contained within the text. For example, she claims that Clarissa's "allegorical" letter to Lovelace—within which Clarissa speaks of meeting Lovelace only in her "father's house" (1233)—is a "paradigm of indeterminacy" (1982, 133); another example of the "active process of divestiture ... [of] all the signifying systems that have at once fascinated and absorbed her, and contributed to her betrayal" (124). Castle suggests that such a process can only end in death. And yet in the novel Clarissa expresses quite clearly her surprise that even the dull Belford can be long "a stranger to a meaning so obvious" (1274) as is contained within her allegory. Ruefully, Belford concedes to Lovelace that: "A *religious* meaning is couched under it, and that's the reason that neither you nor I could find it out" (1274). The implication is that anyone with a religious background would have understood such a letter: so Clarissa is hardly afflicted here with "an ennui, a disinclination to reproduce experience in language" (1982, 129). In fact, she can trust to a sympathetic readership of considerable size.

Again, Castle describes Clarissa's "mad" papers—disordered scraps of letters and quoted poetry, written in the aftermath of her rape—as "powerful images of hermeneutic fragmentation" (1982, 119). Rather, aren't these papers emblematic of a gradual and painful *return* to discourse and hermeneutics? After all that is what happens: Clarissa does indeed go on to interpret and write many more letters after her rape. If there is fragmentation here then it leads once more to reification. Finally Castle notes that the text of Clarissa's will "defeats, pathetically, its own purpose" (132); presumably in that it fails to reconcile Lovelace and the various members of her family to each other. It is certainly the case that: "The text of the will shows Clarissa fully conscious of the conflicting interpretations readers will make of the testament itself" (132). But this does not necessarily mean that Clarissa has despaired of anyone reading her will as she would have hoped. For a start, Belford—Clarissa's appointed executor—describes her as "the admirable testatrix" (1411) and states his belief that in respect of the will "there can be no room for dispute or opposition" (1412). Too, Captain Morden—Belford's co-executor—describes how most of the Harlowes were "much affected" (1421) by his reading of the will. And of course Anna, after a reading of Clarissa's "posthumous letters" (1453) laments,

“what numberless perfections died when my Clarissa drew her last breath!” (1454). There is a tone of ennui in the final part of *Clarissa*; but it seems to me that Castle has misread it. Clarissa has indeed all but despaired of certain readers (her brother James, her sister Arabella, Lovelace himself), who represent certain things (the unnecessarily mean minded bourgeoisie, the rapacious aristocracy). But this does not mean that she has despaired of all readers. Rather, at the end of *Clarissa* Clarissa has reached a position from which she has a certain control over her readership—enough sympathetic readers to be able almost to ignore those readers who are not sympathetic. That position is located in the imaginary realm of epistolary space; which in turn is shaped by the realities of Clarissa’s experience of the urban spaces of London.

Clarissa and London

It is my contention that what the city of London represents to Clarissa becomes a blueprint for imaginations of the epistolary space that eventually constitutes her triumph over Lovelace.⁶ It is no surprise then that Patricia Spacks has pointed out that what critics such as Castle and Terry Eagleton have ignored in *Clarissa* is “the role of Clarissa’s London experience in her development” (1984, 496). After all such critics are similarly unimpressed by the role of Clarissa’s experience of writing in her development. Even Spacks, though, sees this London experience as ultimately leading to failure and ruin: in the end she decides that the “city has taught [Clarissa] the impossibility of living: she cannot survive the chaos of Lovelace’s London, she cannot achieve the simple clarity of the Smiths’” (506). As a consequence Clarissa’s “dying suggests the severe limitation of spiritual economics as a resource in a materialist society” (499). In this section I attempt to redress this critical imbalance by explaining why Clarissa was drawn to London long before she had been brought there by force; why she decided to stay there once she had escaped that force; and what she gained from her experience of the city. In so doing I will be explaining, albeit by means of a detour, the nature of the community of readers and writers that

Clarissa finds in epistolary space; which represents for her a refinement of the similar community that she had initially sought in the urban space of London.

Spacks's judgement of Clarissa's London experience is in line with the general critical consensus on *Clarissa* already outlined. As for instance Eagleton's declaration that: "nothing could be more meekly masochistic ... nothing more pacific than Clarissa's resolute turning of her face to the wall" (1982, 90). But surely the city would not be the place in which to die if your only intention was to turn your face to the wall. Nor would it be necessary to go on writing to the extent that Clarissa does after she has escaped from Lovelace and taken refuge with the Smiths. In view of all this writing Tom Keymer is surely right to describe *Clarissa*—and the eighteenth century epistolary novel in general—as about "the experience of *writing*" (1992, xvi); and Eagleton surely wrong in his judgement of what he terms, "the root of the Richardsonian ideology of writing: the fiction that 'experience' can be conveyed in all its living immediacy by language, the faith that writing and reality may be at one" (1982, 40). This is the sort of thinking which allows Eagleton to put a wholly negative spin upon Clarissa's death so that:

Her death is thus the consummation of her ideology of writing: in dying, she achieves that pure transparency of signifier to signified which she seeks in the integrity of her script. Such transparency—the baffling enigma of that which is merely itself—is bound to appear socially opaque, a worthless tautology ... (75)

For whom exactly in the novel does Clarissa's death represent this worthless tautology? Not Anna, not Belford, not Lovelace, not even the Harlowes; nor a host of the other characters in the book. Castle argues that Clarissa's death comes with the realisation of "her own folly in seeking out transcendent meaning in the texts of this world, where the only available meanings are human, temporary, artificial" (1982, 118-9). But this is to ignore completely the effort Clarissa makes—even as she dies—to create one last text regardless of the humanity, textuality, or artificiality of its meaning. Precisely: how can the existence and nature of Clarissa's coffin, the one significant thing that Clarissa buys rather than sells whilst in London, possibly be slotted into the arguments of Castle and Eagleton?

Echoing Eagleton's phrase quoted above ("socially opaque"), Castle describes the emblems and inscriptions on Clarissa's coffin as "utterly opaque" (1982, 139). And yet we have Belford's disbelieving account of how Clarissa was able to "explain [the emblems] with so little concern as [Mrs Smith and Mrs Lovick] tell me she did to them last night, after I was gone" (1305). Belford, deeply shocked at the appearance of the coffin, marvels at the comprehending reaction of the two women: "'Tis a strange sex! Nothing is too shocking for them to look upon, or see acted, that has but novelty and curiosity in it" (1305). But—after some explanations—he has to exclaim: "How reasonable was all this!" (1304). Indeed, Clarissa seems intuitively to have known that those who mattered to her would understand the text of her coffin. Colonel Morden narrates how, "The plates, and emblems, and inscription, set [the inhabitants of the country around Harlowe Place] ... gazing upon the lid, and admiring" (1398). Again, Anna Howe "seemed to take in at once the meaning of the emblems" (1404). And after almost thirteen hundred pages of *Clarissa* this reader at least would have reacted with surprise if Clarissa had not had inscriptions and emblems placed upon her coffin: knowing by now a little of her own self-confessed "fancy" (1306) in such matters. There are of course many who do not read or do not understand the meaning of the emblems. Belford—until they have been explained—"never was more shocked in my life" (1303). Mr Goddard and Colonel Morden are also both shocked. James Harlowe looks at the lid of the coffin as if he "knew not a symbol or letter upon it" (1398). As for the rest of the Harlowes, they "looked and turned away, looked and turned away, very often upon the emblems" (1399) without word or comment. When Mrs Hervey attempts to read some of the inscriptions to the assembled family she only manages six words and then "could read no further" (1399). But this is not an argument for the opacity of the coffin: for Clarissa clearly did not intend her inscriptions to be read by everyone. She is annoyed when the coffin is delivered with Belford still by her bed as she had ordered it not to be "brought ... in till after dark" (1304). Again, Colonel Morden only finds the coffin after investigating "behind the screen" and then under "a purplish coloured cloth" (1352). Like the letters that Clarissa sends into epistolary space the coffin demands a

sophisticated and sympathetic readership: it is to be assumed that the country folk of Harlowe Place offer more of the latter than the former.⁷

The coffin is the ultimate product of Clarissa's London experience. Castle argues that, "Unlike his victim [it is Lovelace who] ... has control over what one might call the basic 'modes of production' in the epistolary world" (1982, 23). But in this instance Clarissa is able to prove her own mastery over these modes. First of all she exploits the opportunities London offers to sell unneeded clothes in order "to purchase a house" (1250). Then she orders a chair to carry her to an undertaker's shop in Fleet Street, where we learn that "She went into the back shop and talked with the master of it about half an hour" (1272). Once the coffin has been delivered Belford examines with disbelief "a copy of the draft by which all was ordered" (1305). From the first to the last step Clarissa was able, though ill, to deal with the ordering of her own coffin.⁸ Spacks notes that: "In the moral geography of fictional eighteenth-century England, London supplies a locus for energy ... [a] center of passion: lust, gluttony, wrath, envy, avarice, and profligacy" (1984, 487). But in this tracing of the process whereby Clarissa orders her coffin it becomes not so difficult to answer the question: why doesn't Clarissa fly London at the first opportunity? In effect, London is where Clarissa finds not the transcendent meaning that Castle accuses her of folly in seeking; but instead enough transcendence over the meanings of others to be able to create her own texts and to have them read sympathetically—albeit they are only emblems on her own coffin. At the close of the novel this experience of a shared community of meaning is refined and made to serve as the basis for her imaginations of epistolary space.

The whole progress of both Clarissa and *Clarissa* is towards London; and more specifically towards the metropolitan tastes and values it represents. These tastes and values constitute the hope of the relatively stable signifying system that Eagleton and Castle believe Clarissa achieves only in death. Rather, the tragedy of *Clarissa* is that Clarissa's status as a woman only allows her to have access to that signifying system when she is *close* to death. This certainly seems tragic in the light of Dr. Johnson's mournful comment to Boswell, cited in the second epigraph to this chapter. The dilemma that Clarissa faces is hinted at in the very first line of the

novel—in which Anna makes reference to “disturbances” (39) that have been taking place in the Harlowe family. Soon, she becomes more specific and identifies the source of Clarissa’s problems in her question: “must not each of you by the constitutions of your family marry to be *still* richer?” (68). Such a question immediately draws a distinction between the country and the city. For in the city the extension of fortunes—especially after the financial revolution that followed the Glorious Revolution of 1688—no longer depended entirely upon fortuitous marriage.⁹ Clarissa herself demonstrates her lack of sympathy with her family’s values, and conversely her sympathy with urban values, when she reveals to Anna that her own money is “out at interest” and not “rusting in my cabinet” (195), as is the money of her sister Bella.

But Clarissa demonstrates her essential metropolitanism nowhere more clearly than in the reasons she gives for her distaste for Roger Solmes and initial attraction to Robert Lovelace. Clarissa tells Anna that Solmes “is very illiterate, knows nothing but the value of estates and how to improve them, and what belongs to land-jobbing, and husbandry” (62); he is “a plain country gentleman” (224), who suffers from an “even constitutional narrowness” (243). On the other hand, “Mr Lovelace has certainly taste; and ... judgement in most of the politer arts” (187). This difference is particularly enlightening in respect of John Brewer’s argument that during the eighteenth century London “became defined not merely as the capital and the hub of the nation’s economy but as a centre of culture” (1997, 50). Not only this, but our whole “modern idea of ‘high culture’ is an eighteenth-century invention” (xvi). For Clarissa marriage with Lovelace would represent interaction with this new high culture: she asks Anna Howe specifically to enquire after “Lovelace’s life and conversation in town” (133). Conversely, marriage to Solmes would entail exclusion from it—when contemplating the likely reality of such a marriage Clarissa laments: “Oh my dear! what a degree of patience, what a greatness of soul, is required in the wife, not to despise a husband who is more ignorant, more illiterate, more low-minded, than herself?” (241). Neither is it an option for Clarissa to stay within her own family if she wants access to the new high culture. Her brother James is the most educated of all the Harlowes but Clarissa detests his “air of college sufficiency”

(225). Moreover, in drawing attention to his “pedantry by so detestable an allusion or reference to the Georgic” she laments the crassness of his application of what he has learned “at the university” (219). In contrast we are to assume that the literary quotations with which Lovelace bedecks his letters are an example of a far less crass application: an entry point to what Brewer defines as “the community of taste” (1997, xviii).¹⁰

Clarissa’s eagerness for the new culture—which can be seen as a desire for community of meaning only truly realised in epistolary space—is often used to attack or trick her. Thus when the odious Betty Barnes delivers the message that Clarissa is to be moved to her uncle’s moated house, Clarissa writes that Betty “was *astonished* (her hands and eyes lifted up) that I should set myself against going to a house so much in *my taste*” (225). Again, when Clarissa first arrives at Mrs Sinclair’s house she writes that:

I have turned over the books I have found in my closet ... and think the better of the people of the house for their sakes ... Nelson’s *Feasts and Fasts*; a sacramental piece ... of Dr Gauden ... Steele’s, Rowe’s, and Shakespeare’s plays ... In the blank leaves of the Nelson and Bishop Gauden is Mrs Sinclair’s name; in those of most of the others, either Sally Martin or Mary Horton, the names of the two nieces. (525-6)

This ruse is designed to make Clarissa trust Sinclair and the other lesser members of the brothel to which Lovelace takes her: for earlier Lovelace had written to Belford: “I have already been so good as to send up a list of books to be procured for the lady’s closet, mostly at *second-hand*” (473). The problem Clarissa has here is her initial lack of knowledge of the complex city which spawned the new culture. Early on her thoughts turn there: “Shall I fly to London, and endeavour to hide myself from Lovelace as well as from all my own relations ...?” (231). But she does not yet make the distinction between court and city, east and west London. Lovelace’s “wild life in town” (50)—of which Clarissa is early and rightly suspicious—undoubtedly took place at court in west London. In contrast I have drawn attention in chapter four to Brewer’s argument that cultural production was becoming more urban as it became less courtly. Consequently, it is the city to which Clarissa is most likely to have been

attracted. Only when she has been in London does Clarissa fully appreciate the difference between the two sides of London. Indeed, Edward Copeland demonstrates the literalness of Clarissa's realisation in his charting of the movements of Clarissa and Lovelace towards the end of the novel; and in his conclusion that in "*Clarissa*, the two protagonists divide the city between themselves, drawing the dare-you-to-cross-it line at the east-west division of St Martin's Lane" (1989, 65). Like Richardson himself then, Clarissa naturally gravitated towards the culture of the commercial side of London and away from the court.

The theme of progress towards London and its new culture was initially elaborated by Richardson in his *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1741). Indeed in the publication of this volume of model letters Richardson involves himself in the exportation of metropolitan tastes and values to the countryside: to those "country readers ... unable to indite for themselves" (quoted in Downs 1928, ix). For the "common style" (ix) that he hopes to impart is urban; the tide of advice overbearingly from the city to the country. For example letter XXVI is "*From a Country Chapman beginning Trade, to a City Dealer, offering his Correspondence*"; and Letter XLII "*To a Country Correspondent [from a City Dealer], modestly requesting a Balance of Accounts between them*". These letters are unremittingly urban and sophisticated, unflappable—designed to alter for the better "the innocent and thoughtless heart" (Richardson 1928, xxix). Elizabeth Brophy notes that: "One group [of the letters] can be classified as dealing with concerns of business and trade" (1987, 7)—only to beg the question: one group only? For even when questions of courtship and marriage are discussed the tone remains the same. The writer of Letter LXXX declares herself "very little in love with the fashionable methods of courtship" (102); and the writer of Letter LXXIX intones austere that: "I should be happy to see you mine, when we have both out-lived the taste for everything that has not virtue and reason to support it" (101). Noticeably, this "taste" situates the "common style" of the *Familiar Letters* firmly in the east of London. The father of Letter LXVII exhorts against "the wild assertion, of a rake making a good husband" (85); and indeed in his "Preface" Richardson reveals that one of his prime motives for constructing a book of model letters was to warn against "the clandestine addresses

of fortune-hunters" (xxix). In Richardson's London there is only one way to make a fortune: and that is through adherence to such formulas as are laid down by the writer of Letter LX: "Remissness is inexcusable in all men, but in none so much as in a man of business" (70).

Contrary to my argument Carol Flynn observes that: "In his own *Familiar Letters*, Richardson did his best to warn off the unwary visitor to London" (1982, 104). But Richardson's intention was surely not to warn off visitors to London. Rather, he sought to *make* them wary. For example Letter LXII is written by "A young Woman in Town to her Sister in the Country, recounting her narrow Escape from a Snare laid for her, on her first Arrival, by a wicked Procuress". Although the young woman recalls to her sister previous warnings of "dangers that would too probably attend us on coming to London" (Richardson 1928, 72), she points out that such were of no use in face of the experience of London itself. And yet the purpose of the letter is not to warn off; but instead to "serve to teach us to be upon our guard for the future, as well against the viler part of our own sex, as that of the other" (76). There is a sense of inevitability about the processes which have created many of the separated families of the *Familiar Letters*, left busily writing to each other—as for instance Letter XXVIII's "Maid-servant in Town, acquainting her Father and Mother in the Country with a Proposal of Marriage". The Father and Mother answer this letter with the calm acceptance of a *fait accompli*: "We can only pray to God to direct and bless you in all your engagements. Our distance from you, must make us leave everything to your own discretion" (37). Without any knowledge of London the Father and Mother here can only hope that their daughter has acquired enough of her own. Brophy notes that the *Familiar Letters* "generally follow the prevailing spirit of the times" (1987, 14). But in fact they represent a closely reasoned argument for a specific direction for the times. Richardson was involved in the creation of a new commercial code: he undoubtedly knew that the move to a full market economy would be painful and that there would be many casualties. In the eighteenth century these casualties came about as the result of a grand experiment in a new way of living: E. A. Wrigley notes that: "the population of London rose by about 275,000 between 1650 and 1750" (1975, 63). Daniel Baugh speaks of "the new necessities of

commerce and finance" (1975, 15); and these necessities required a constant influx of people from the country and to the city. Thus the quicker and the smoother the process of adaptation to the city the better for the wealth and prosperity of the city. Perhaps for these reasons Richardson gives what he terms "Eleven Epistles ... to give a brief Description of London and Westminster, to such as have not seen those Cities: and to point out to those who never were in Town before, what is most worthy of Notice in it." By such means Richardson contributes to that process whereby London in the eighteenth century became "a fantastic, imaginary space ... a real place and ... an imagined locale in art and literature" (Brewer 1997, 31). In doing so he would only be speeding up the drift of population from the country to the city; so fuelling a change of lifestyle with which he himself was familiar. Significantly, Richardson evidently hoped to do so by means of the wide distribution of familiar letters from the city to the country, carried by a postal service only now capable of such distribution.

The kind of epistolary space that *Clarissa* develops is a product of this change of lifestyle; and of the new culture that it spawned. *Clarissa* herself can be seen as a part of the eighteenth century movement from the country to the city: and as one of London's victims once she gets there. In fact she becomes a victim of just the sort of rake and just the type of procuress that the *Familiar Letters* repeatedly warn against. In many ways *Clarissa's* decision to remain in London after her final escape from Lovelace is a strange and baffling one. At the beginning of the novel *Clarissa* often inveighs against London. In response to Anna's oft-repeated and increasingly desperate advice that "you should get privately to London" (330), *Clarissa* speaks with horror of "town-women, and their confident ways!" (286); declares that she has "such a bad opinion of the place" (351); and reasons that: "supposing I could remain there concealed, what might not my youth, my sex, an unacquaintedness with the ways of that great, wicked town, expose me to?" (335). Too, *Clarissa* often imagines the body of the female population of the town as corrupt and lascivious. She asks Anna: "If a woman loves such a man, how can she bear the thought of dividing her interest in his affections with half the town ...?" (563); again she declares with discomposing ease: "must not the man be a brute indeed, who can cast off a woman

whom he has seduced (if he take her from the town, that's another thing)" (613). But as soon as Clarissa leaves Harlowe Place the drag of the city is felt like a riptide around her ankles. Lovelace tells Clarissa that "he has business of consequence in London" (262); Simon Collins, the higgler to whom Anna entrusts her letters, "goes to town constantly on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays" (529); whilst looking after his dying uncle Belford tells Lovelace that "My servant, or his, must of necessity be in town every day on his case, or on other affairs, and one of them shall regularly attend you for any letter or commands" (560); Lady Elizabeth Laurence tells Lovelace that she is "obliged to go to town on my old Chancery affair" (784); and Mrs Norton speaks of a "servant of Sir Robert Beachcroft, who rides post on his master's business to town" (1120). According to Michael Benedikt it was not until the late 1960s that London became an "immense node of communications, a messy nexus of messages" (1991, 16). But quite clearly the London of *Clarissa* and the *Familiar Letters* was already functioning in this manner—sucking those in the country gradually towards its centre of communications.

Once Clarissa has been in London for some time constructions of the city become less one-sided and negative. For a start, the judgement of many of those who condemn London is called seriously into question. Mrs Hodges, the scarcely literate housekeeper of the unforgiving John Harlowe, writes: "Ecscuse me, maddam; but Lundon is a pestilent plase" (984). Clarissa herself remembers that the pretended Lady Betty, who lured her back from safety in Hampstead to be raped, had declared that she: "never chose to lie in the smoky town if she could help it" (1001). And as if to emphasise the point both the pretended Lady Betty and the pretended Miss Montague trick Clarissa into drinking drugged milk by observing "that the milk was London milk; far short in goodness of what they were accustomed to from their own dairies" (1008). Neither is the country seen as intrinsically good. Anna derides the gullibility of country folk in the following terms: "I never had any faith in the stories that go current among country girls, of spectres, familiars, and demons" (1014). And Lovelace knows that he will be able to manipulate Anna's messenger to Hampstead as soon as he sees him for "a young country fellow" (855). Also, many of the deceivers in the novel are from the country. For instance, Lovelace congratulates

Johanetta Golding on her impersonation of Miss Montague as follows: "Pretty well, cousin Charlotte, for a young country lady!" (876). Most telling of all Lovelace writes to Belford thus:

I imagine that thou wilt be apt to suspect that some passages in this letter were written in town. Why, Jack, I cannot but say that the Westminster air is a little grosser than that at Hampstead ... And I think in my heart, that I can say and write those things at one place, which I cannot at the other; nor indeed anywhere else. (870)

If this is to say something intrinsic about London then how is it possible for Clarissa to write the letters that she does write from the city? Rather, the city in *Clarissa* is a place that each person must make for her or himself. So that when, late into the novel, Clarissa once more complains about the city she is doing so in very specific terms: "Bless me! how little do we, who have lived all our time in the country, know of this wicked town!" (919). The solution to this problem is to learn quickly—in order to keep up with that multitude of whom Dorcas Wykes draws attention to just one example: "a wicked gentleman practised in the ways of the town" (921).

Copeland has already explored in detail the practical uses to which *Clarissa* puts London—revealed most tellingly in the following note to Anna: "You must know then, that this great town, wicked as it is, wants not opportunities of being better; having daily prayers at several churches in it; and I am desirous ... to embrace those opportunities" (1139-40). But in tune with the general downbeat critical consensus on the ending of *Clarissa*, he decides that:

the great impersonal systems of Defoe's London, and Richardson's ... are, in fact, the horror of this "monster city" as well as its glory ... with the hum and bustle, the practicality and efficiency of London's systems, the language of London in *Clarissa* suggests, finally, to me at least, a chilling vision of anomie—a world filled with people, and at the same time, a world despairingly empty. (1989, 68-9)

Is this stress on impersonality a correct summation of the London Richardson has created?¹¹ Copeland speaks of "a city of services provided ... a city given shape by its systems of transportation and services" (61); and judges that in *Clarissa*, "London

and its systems operate in utter truthfulness" (57). And yet Copeland ignores the service industry with which the novel is most concerned; the system which draws young women from the country and into the city in order to work as prostitutes.¹² The monstrous Mrs Sinclair's control of these sexual services is hardly a proof of the dictum that the "language of commerce is the language of truth: in Clarissa's London, the coaches run on time" (55). One wonders whether the "customers in the fore-house" (1387) of Sinclair's brothel would have agreed with this judgement on the night that Sinclair, in a drunken stupor, fell down a set of stairs and broke her leg; and lay there howling all night, the other prostitutes "as unable to help themselves as she" (1389). Sinclair's system of prostitution is hardly remarkable for being "impersonal". Neither is impersonality a noticeable characteristic of the city and its people at other times. For instance when Clarissa tries to escape from the brothel by crying, "Murder! Help! Help!" (906), Mrs Sinclair and some others of "the nymphs" complain to Lovelace "because of the reputation of their house, as they call it, having received some insults (broken windows threatened) to make them produce the young creature who cried out ... [and because of] a constable being actually fetched" (906). Only by an ingenious piece of trickery can Lovelace manage to prevent Clarissa being rescued in this manner. Thus the city's systems are shown to be sporadically, but often dangerously, active; especially when a young country girl is in town.

Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the repeated attention that is drawn to one area or site of London that retains its horror right to the end of the novel. After her rape Clarissa describes herself to Lovelace as "a creature whom thou hast levelled with the dirt of the street" (912). Lovelace himself speaks with hyperbole of a "murder committed in the street" (941). Mrs Norton exclaims with horror: "What a dreadful thing indeed was it for my dearest tender young lady to be arrested in the streets of London!" (1154). And Anna Howe also focuses on the horror of this aspect of Clarissa's arrest: "What must have been your anguish on so disgraceful an insult, committed in the open streets, and in the open day!" (1086). For the open streets of London are the one place in which Clarissa cannot control her readers once she has escaped from both Harlowe Place and Lovelace. It is Belford who recounts to

Lovelace the story of Clarissa's arrest. Officers had waylaid Clarissa in the street outside church—and as the scene began to gather pace:

A crowd had before begun to gather ... The people were most of them struck with compassion. A fine young creature!—A thousand pities! some—while some few threw out vile and shocking reflections: but a gentleman interposed, and demanded to see the fellows' authority. (1052)

This is hardly the “vision of anomie” described by Copeland. In the open streets people are free to read Clarissa just as they choose: exactly as it had been at Harlowe Place. There, Clarissa had lamented: “When what I have before written in the humblest strain has met with such strange constructions, I am afraid that this unguarded scrawl will be very ill-received” (258). It was to escape such readings that Clarissa originally had planned what she terms “my London scheme” (342). Castle draws repeated attention—not least in the title of her book—to the sadness of Clarissa's lament that “I am but a cipher, to give him significance and myself pain” (567). But she does not acknowledge that this is a two way process—also painful to those around Clarissa. So, Clarissa reports to Anna the accusations of her sister Bella thus: “That I next-to-bewitched people, by my insinuating address: that nobody could be valued or respected but must stand like cyphers wherever I came” (194). The sad truth of *Clarissa* is that readers without like minds often hurt or destroy each other. And only the city promises escape in its plenitude of people: and therefore of like-minded readers somewhere.

Clarissa and Epistolary Space

Experience of the new urban culture of London offers Clarissa the hope of a shared community of meaning; but the city remains an essentially dangerous place housing many competing communities quite willing to corrupt and exploit her meanings. And so in *Clarissa* the city is always as much of an abstract idea as an actuality: one step on the road towards existence within that state of perpetual written communication described in sections one and two. Perhaps this is because London for Clarissa represents at some level an analogue for another kind of city altogether:

the holy city described by St. John the Divine in the last two chapters of the book of Revelation. Therein, "I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven" (Rev. 21:2, Authorized (King James) Version). In more detail John adds that: "the building of the wall of it was *of* jasper: and the city *was* pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city *were* garnished with all manner of precious stones" (21:18-19). Significantly John further adds that: "the street of the city *was* pure gold, as it were transparent glass" (21:21). The purification of the streets of the holy city comes about as a result of exclusion. For John continues, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone which is the second death" (21:8). This last reads like a cast list of all those who abuse Clarissa at various times during the novel. And it is that part of the city of London over which Clarissa has no control, the open streets, which the creation of the holy city will first and most pointedly rectify. The holy city is then a progression on from the city of London as far as Clarissa is concerned. The first words that God says to John upon his vision of the holy city are as follows: "Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful" (21:5). And it is by writing—and subsequent entry into epistolary space—that Clarissa achieves her version of the holy city whilst still on earth. Kearney may argue that in *Clarissa* the "mechanism of correspondence" opens up "a whole world of isolation and despair, of uncrossable distances between people and imperfect understandings" (1975, 15). But such an argument does not tally very well with what we know of Clarissa's experience of writing letters before, and especially after, her ordeal at the hands of Lovelace.

The intimacy between Anna and Clarissa is based upon writing; for "One of the first conditions of our mutual friendship was that each should say or write to the other whatever was upon her mind" (135). Even when Clarissa admits that her error "began with carrying on a prohibited correspondence" she refuses to declaim or blame her "delight in writing" (408). In fact at one point Clarissa declares: "I know not how to forbear writing. I have now no other employment or diversion. I must

write on, although I were not to send it to anybody" (483). Castle makes much of Anna's status as "an aggressive exegete" (1982, 77) often misreading Clarissa's situation and so compromising her safety. This does happen; but it would be perverse to suggest that Clarissa and Anna do not always arrive at a shared understanding in the end. Lovelace himself understands this when, in anticipation of the end of the correspondence between Clarissa and Anna, he writes: "I am not sorry for it: now will she have nobody to compare notes with" (554). It is by comparing notes taken from different vantages that Clarissa and Anna come closer to the truth of what Lovelace is up to: mistakes are made, but they are almost always rectified (as in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; wherein multiple writers with many different experiences pool resources against Dracula). Towards the end of the novel Clarissa does nothing at all but write: Belford informs Lovelace that Clarissa's apothecary "blamed her for so great an application as he was told she made to her pen" (1127).

In the same way that I have compared the community of meaning that Clarissa finds in epistolary space with that of London, that imaginary area termed cyberspace has also often been seen in terms of abstract ideas of the city. William Gibson describes its very fabric as "Like city lights, receding ..." (1995, 67). Again, Benedikt describes cyberspace as "billowing, glittering, humming, coursing, a Borgesian library, a city" (1991, 2). He goes on to compare cyberspace directly to "the image of the Heavenly City, the new Jerusalem of the book of Revelation" and to note that:

the Heavenly City stands for our transcendence of both materiality and nature; where Eden stands for the world of unsymbolized, asocial reality, the Heavenly City stands for the world of enlightened human interaction, form and information. (15)

When Benedikt adds that cyberspace represents "the availability of all things pleasurable and cultured" (15) this begins to sound very much like the culture of the ideal city that Clarissa yearns for throughout *Clarissa*; and like eighteenth century perceptions of the city as traced by Brewer. In *Clarissa* the equivalent of cyberspace is epistolary space: that vast and vastly attenuated city of imagined space and community that exists between the many letter writers of this novel. I see this space

in the manner of a city stretched out and flattened like a grid across the map of Britain. It is my argument that this space—within which much of the action of the novel takes place—is directly imagined by many of the characters in *Clarissa*; and that its realisation constitutes Clarissa's triumph over Lovelace and the Harlowes.

In a newspaper article about various attempts that have been made to map cyberspace, Andrew Brown draws attention to Martin Dodge's insistence that: "People have a real desire to find out where they are ... and to make a space real by mapping it."¹³ Brown goes on to note that in Dodge's "favourite maps, the continents fountain light at each other, representing the streams of information washing the world"—as shown in figure 3. In other maps Brown notes that cyberspace is seen in terms of "great towers of data surrounded by defensive ice, with tiny probes flying between them, thirsting for information like mosquitoes"—as in figure 4. Two things need to be said in relation to the connection between *Clarissa* and these maps. First, they are related to the postal map re-produced in chapter two; although they have escaped both the need to stay tied to the ground and the need for 'posts.' And second, the imagination of such strange and unfamiliar spaces as are shown in figures 3 and 4 is perceived to have the power to make things happen. For instance, Eva Pascoe notes that "the Internet is freeing people from their work-related prison of suburbia"¹⁴ and hence altering the landscape of living and working; and Charles Arthur draws attention to the debate that has been taking place as to whether or not the Internet will lead to a "withering of the nation state."¹⁵ My argument is that the imagination of epistolary spaces will also have the potential to make things happen: in fact to shape the nature of Clarissa's triumph.

The existence of epistolary space within *Clarissa* is what gives the lie to the poststructuralist insistence on Clarissa's belief "in a correspondence between utterance and truth, between the outward sign and the inward reality" (Castle 1982, 67). On the contrary, Clarissa is always aware that something—interception, misinterpretation—is liable to happen to writing once it is sent into epistolary space.¹⁶ She shares many of the anxieties of the letter writers discussed in the introduction to this thesis but writes letters all the same; as the social space that is set up in the process is perceived to be worth the risks. For example, having written to



figure 3: visualisation of Internet Traffic flows

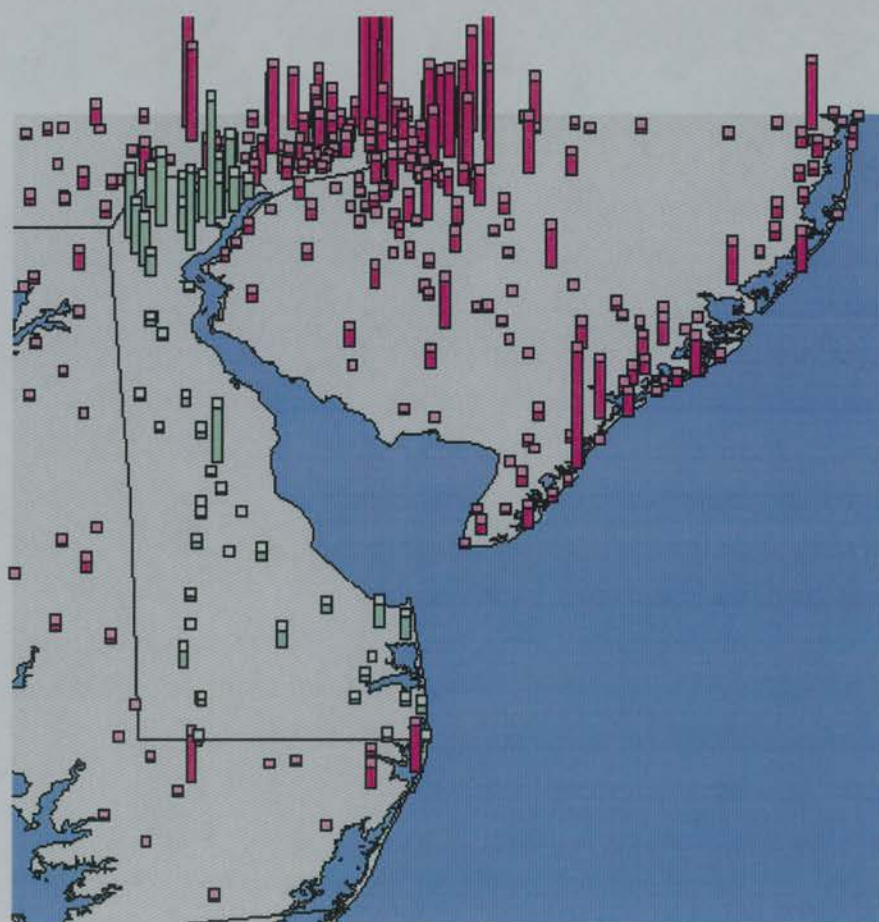


figure 4: another visualisation of Internet Traffic flows

Lovelace she tells Anna that “Now the letter is out of my power, I have more uneasiness and regret than I had before” (343). Later, Clarissa is again disturbed about the letter she has sent to Lovelace “for no other reason, I believe, than because it was out of my power” (352). Lovelace himself is aware that it is not the writing of a letter that signals his power over Clarissa but the fact that she allows him into her epistolary space. Pointedly, he “burn[s] with a desire to be admitted into so sweet a correspondence” (573) as takes place between Anna and Clarissa. So, when Lovelace recovers the torn and unsent letter within which Clarissa finally assents to marry him he ponders as follows:

I have just read over again this intended answer to my proposals: and how I adore her for it! But yet; another yet!—She has not given it or sent it to me—So it is not *her* answer. It is not written *for* me, though *to* me. Nay, she has not *intended* to send it to me: she has even torn it, perhaps with indignation, as thinking it too *good* for me. By this action she absolutely retracts it. (656)

It is the surrender into the arena of epistolary space that Lovelace craves most: an entry into the attenuated city that Clarissa has created. And this is precisely what he never gets after the rape has been committed. For it is the sanctity of this space that many of the characters in *Clarissa* strive to protect above almost all others—on a par indeed with their own bodies.¹⁷ Simon Varey argues that:

personal space and the politics of space give Richardson’s fiction—especially *Clarissa*—its uniquely compelling power ... The action of *Clarissa* occurs almost exclusively in enclosed spaces ... Clarissa’s moral struggles are fought continually in spaces that have become her prisons. (1990, 184)

But Varey misses the most important space of all in *Clarissa*: epistolary space. He goes on to argue that: “To a large extent *Clarissa* is obviously ‘about’ isolation” (186). And whereas it is certainly true that many of the central characters in *Clarissa* are isolated, it is equally true that the novel is manifestly and centrally concerned with the means by which those characters achieve connection. In this sense the “recurrent violation of personal space” (187) that takes place does not involve locked rooms and corners of gardens: but rather that intangible space that is set up between

two people who write to each other—and into which they project that writing. So, when Mrs Harlowe confirms to Clarissa that “’Tis true, your father threatened to confine you to your chamber, if you complied not, in order the more assuredly to deprive you of the opportunity of corresponding with those who harden your heart against his will” (115) the restriction of personal space is only a means to the end of the restriction of epistolary space. Again, when Clarissa first arrives at Mrs Sinclair’s brothel she notes: “As soon as I arrived, I took possession of my apartment. [I] shall make good use of the light closet in it, if I stay here any time” (524). So, once more, personal space is no more than an adjunct to epistolary space.

Lovelace too shows himself aware of the precious nature of the epistolary space existing between Anna and Clarissa, when he hesitates to intercept their letters: “But this must not be attempted yet. An invasion in an article so sacred would ruin me beyond retrieve” (463). Clarissa confirms this suspicion of Lovelace’s when she tells Anna: “I think it may not be amiss to desire you to look carefully to the seals of my letters, as I shall to those of yours. If I find him base in this particular, I shall think him capable of any evil” (529). Again, the most dramatic scene that takes place between Anna and her mother is elaborated thus: “Indeed ’tis true. My mamma thought fit to slap my hands to get from me a sheet of a letter she caught me writing to you; which I tore because she would not read it, and burnt it before her face” (476). And—before the rape—the most dramatic scene that takes place between Lovelace and Clarissa is described by a slightly nonplussed Lovelace in terms of “the unavailing attempt I made to see a dropped letter, little imagining that there could be room for mortal displeasure on that account, from what two such ladies could write to each other” (652). The rape seems to be the eventual and inevitable outcome of this very incomprehension: Lovelace’s inability to connect with Clarissa as Anna can and does. Indeed after the rape Lovelace makes only half-hearted attempts to come into Clarissa’s presence. Instead he retreats to a distance that makes letter writing practicable and sets about begging and pleading for “the favour then of a few lines” (1185).

Nor is this fear of the violation of epistolary space only experienced in terms of the correspondence between Anna and Clarissa. Surprisingly, Lovelace seems to

feel it just as much in terms of his own correspondence with Belford. Lovelace tells Belford that his honour is broken through for revealing to Clarissa: "Letters that thou shouldst sooner have parted with thy cursed tongue than have owned thou ever hadst received ... letters written under the seal of friendship" (1183). Belford himself expresses embarrassment in showing Clarissa even Lovelace's most serious letters—as therein is "such a false bravery, endeavouring to carry off ludicrously the subjects that most affect thee; that those letters are generally the least fit to be seen which ought to be most to thy credit" (1077). Indeed it is Lovelace who visualises epistolary space in the most explicit terms. For instance, in his impatience to hear word of the dying Clarissa Lovelace berates Belford thus:

To send a man and horse on purpose; as I did! My imagination chained to the belly of the beast, in order to keep pace with him! Now he is got to this place; now to that; now to London; now to thee. Now (a letter given him) whip and spur upon the return. This town just entered, not staying to bait: that village passed by: leaves the wind behind him; in a foaming sweat, man and horse. (1291)

Another time Lovelace enters epistolary space in far more sadistic mood—telling Belford: "Confound thee for a malicious devil! I wish thou wert a post-horse, and I upon the back of thee! How would I whip and spur ..." (1069). This visualisation of existence inside epistolary space is a version of that infiniteness that Emily Dickinson moves towards in her poem 'The Way I read a Letter's—this—'. True, the poem begins by explaining; "'Tis first—I lock the door—/ And push it with my fingers—next—/ For transport it be sure—" (quoted in Johnson 1960, 314)—but this securing of personal space is only a precondition for entry into the far more precious realm of epistolary space which allows her to "Peruse how infinite I am/ To no one that You—know—/ And sigh for lack of Heaven—but not/ The Heaven God bestow" (315).

Castle notes that the "excruciating situation *Clarissa* dramatizes is that a rhetorical system is *not* 'powerful' unless grounded in political power ... the patriarchal discourse of the Harlowes and Lovelace" (1982, 24-5). But nowhere does Castle recognise that alternative source of power which Clarissa realises in the

communities of which she is a part at the end of the novel: both in London and in epistolary space. In contrast, Lovelace is seen to be excluded from both of these communities. In London Clarissa lies on her deathbed—but surrounded by people who appreciate her true worth and who are appreciated by her: the Smiths, Colonel Morden, Belford, Mrs Lovick, Dr H., Mr Goddard; and, by letter, Anna Howe, Mrs Norton, and the Rev. Dr Lewen. All of these people are participants to some extent in the new urban culture that John Brewer and Colin Campbell describe as coming into being in the eighteenth century; and that has been elaborated earlier.¹⁸ And yet their most vital participation in this culture takes place within that epistolary space that is set up by the one person they all have in common: Clarissa. This eclectic band of dwellers in the cities of London and epistolary space come together as a result of the same conditions that allow cyberspace to contribute towards the “forming [of] communities of interest that are not bound by the accidents of geography” (Godwin 1996, xv). The forming of these communities—at least in cyberspace—is almost always associated by theorists with what Dale Spender terms “shifts in power, wealth, influence, organisation” (1995, xiv). Again, the Internet designer and philosopher Esther Dyson predicts that “the Net can be used to better our lives, to enhance our relationships and to make the little guy more important. The balance of power will tip more towards the individual.”¹⁹ Clarissa’s triumph is that she has achieved a measure of this tip in the balance of power through her use of epistolary space. And in this way she is prophetic of city women to come: the still vulnerable Annie Hall of Woody Allen’s documentation of Manhattan springs to mind. Clarissa’s tragedy is that she hankers after reconciliation with the old order of those towards whom she has no true connection: the Harlowes.

In an anonymous spoof of *Clarissa* that appeared briefly in *The Independent*, entitled “e-mail > female”, no such hankering takes place.²⁰ Therein “annahowe@richardsons.com” and “clarissah@greatestates.co.uk”, two independent and forthright young women, bicker about “hated bossman solmes” in a series of fast and furious and scarcely punctuated e-mails, set in the world of urban office politics. Clarissa has a long way to go before she reaches that stage; and yet her hankering, even her death, does not dim the light of the glimmer of hope that Richardson’s novel

constitutes. Eagleton argues that Richardson is writing on behalf of a class: the newly emergent bourgeoisie. He also, however, seems to be interesting himself, in *Clarissa*, in the movement towards a different way of living that might be termed metropolitan. Such a reading would allow room for the retaining of what Keymer refers to as Richardson's "didactic project" (1992, xvii); and for what Richardson himself describes as *Clarissa*'s "triumphant death"—wholly ignored as both have been by poststructuralist critics' attempts to delineate *Clarissa*'s naïve thirst for transcendent meaning.

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¹ All quotations from *Clarissa* are taken from Angus Ross's edition (1985); and followed by page numbers in brackets.

² In *Pamela*—published in 1740 but "set fifteen to twenty years in the past" (Duncan Eaves and Kimpel 1971, xiii)—Richardson had shown how hard it was at that time for the working class but literate Andrews family to gain fair access to postal services. (Indeed it is as a result of manipulation of the Post Office that Mr. B. is able to hold Pamela against her will). Perhaps there is a parallel here with concerns over fair distribution of access to the Internet: with what Oliver Burkeman (in an article entitled "Internet's global reach is not at all utopian," published in *The Independent*, 17th August 1998) describes as "the 'digital divide'—the gap between the information haves and have-nots."

³ Ross points out that in later editions of his novel Richardson was forced "to blacken Lovelace's character" (1985, 17) by means of numerous additions, as a result of the fact that too many people were reading Lovelace's—rather than *Clarissa*'s—letters sympathetically.

⁴ These comments were made in an article entitled 'He's not being funny, he's struggling under the capitalist yoke', published in *The Observer*, 15th February 1998.

⁵ See for example two articles in *The Independent*: the first by John Carlin, "Hacker breaks into Pentagon computer", 26th February 1998; the second by Charles Arthur and Nicholas von Herberstein, "Cyberterror attack rocks America", 5th March 1998.

⁶ I go on in section four to examine some of the many ways in which cyberspace—that modern version of epistolary space—has been imagined in terms of the metaphor of the city: in the meantime see M. Christine Boyer's book *Cybercities* and in particular its extended analysis of "the analogy between the computer matrix and the space of the city" (1996, 9). Throughout section three I will draw attention to parallels between the way in which the new urban space of London was experienced in the eighteenth century; and the way in which cyberspace has been experienced in the twentieth century.

⁷ This split between urban sophisticates and backward country dwellers is a precursor of the split that Paul Virilio imagines will open up in the twenty first century, with the imminent coexistence of on the one hand: "a society of 'cocoons' ... where people

hide away at home, linked into communication networks, inert ...[and on the other] a society of the ultra-crowded megalopolis and of urban nomadism" (1993, 75).

⁸ In her readiness to consume services Clarissa shows herself to be a part of that "consumer revolution" (1987, *passim*) identified by Colin Campbell as beginning in the mid-eighteenth century. This revolution took place principally among "the middle or trading classes" (31) and in London; and so it is not surprising that Clarissa's destination is the Smiths' shop in Covent Garden. I would further suggest—in the light of Campbell's claim that this revolution was made possible by a new "skilful use of the faculty of imagination" (76)—that the much-used and vastly profitable Post Office was the paradigm service inaugurated by the consumer revolution.

⁹ For brief synopses of the birth and progress of the financial revolution see either the introduction to Nicholson (1994); or H.T. Dickinson (1979).

¹⁰ Amongst others Lovelace quotes in his letters from Sir Robert Howard, Alexander Pope, Edmund Waller, Robert Greene, the Earl of Rochester, and Jonathan Swift; Clarissa quotes from Elizabeth Carter, Congreve, and John Milton; and both quote from Shakespeare, Nathaniel Lee, Thomas Otway, John Dryden, Abraham Cowley, and Nicholas Rowe. Thus for the eighteenth century reader the very act of reading *Clarissa* would have constituted a means of interacting with the new culture.

¹¹ The impersonality detected by Edward Copeland can be compared with contemporary experience of cyberspace, where, as Kevin Robins notes, "in this accommodating reality, the self is reconstituted as a fluid and polymorphous entity. Identities can be selected or discarded almost at will, as in a game or a fiction" (1995, 138).

¹² There is a parallel here with warnings about cyber-romances and the dangers of becoming vulnerable to a psycho in a "chat-room." See for example an article by I. Katz entitled "Trail of cyber-sex, lies and floppy disks ends in divorce suit," in the *Guardian*, 3rd February 1996; and another by A. Billen entitled "Kiss of the cyber-woman," in the *Observer*, 11th February 1996.

¹³ This article was entitled "What does cyberspace look like? Martin Dodge's maps are the best images yet", and was published in the Saturday magazine section of the *Independent*, 14th March 1998. Dodge's collection of geographic metaphors of cyberspace can be found in "An Atlas of Cyberspaces" at <http://www.Cybergeography.org/atlas/geographic.html>. Similar maps can be found in Stephen G. Eick's "Network Visualisation Gallery" at <http://www.bell-labs.com/user/eick/NetworkVis.html/>.

¹⁴ This article was entitled "Given half a chance—and a decent Internet connection—many of us would not hesitate to flee from suburbia", and was published in the network section of the *Independent*, 28th October 1997.

¹⁵ This article was entitled "Internet will not replace the nation state, says academic", and was published in the *Independent*, 29th October 1997.

¹⁶ This relational awareness is what excludes Clarissa's version of epistolary space from many of Robins's criticisms of modern utopian conceptions of cyberspace. Robins argues that: "when it seems as if the new technologies are responding to regressive and solipsistic desires, we should consider the consequences and implications for moral and political life in the real world" (1995, 146).

¹⁷ In connection with this idea Ruth Perry notes that in *Pamela* there “is a wonderfully vivid illustration of the implicit equivalence between a woman’s writings and her person in the well-known scene in which Mr. B. tries to undress Pamela, ostensibly in order to get at the personal correspondence which Pamela has sewn into her clothes” (1980, 131).

¹⁸ Campbell argues that his consumer revolution was part of “a wider cultural revolution” (1987, 25).

¹⁹ This article was entitled “She’s strictly an e-mail female”, and was published in the *Independent*, 19th November 1997.

²⁰ See for examples columns in the fast track section of *The Independent* dated 9th April 1998 and 28th May 1998.

POSTSCRIPT/ CONCLUSION

*Well, I'm here to deliver
 I hope that you can read my mail
 (oh, yeah)
 I just escaped last night
 From the memory county jail
 I see your box is open
 And your flag is up
 My message is ready
 If there's time enough.
 from the lyrics to Neil Young's 'Motorcycle Mama'*

(i)

The Canadian singer-songwriter Neil Young was widely felt to have returned to his folk and country roots—after a series of flirtations with rock music—with the release of the *Comes a Time* album in 1978. The sleeve art features Young in cowboy hat, cradling an acoustic guitar; and the first eight tracks of the album are soft and melancholy ballads and laments with harmony vocals provided by Nicolette Larson. Even the two tracks featuring Crazy Horse, Young's legendary backing band, are unusually restrained and gentle. The ninth track, however, is different. Young begins in the spirit of the rest of the album, softly imploring in the first chorus: "Motorcycle Mama/ Won't you lay your big spike down/ Always get in trouble when you bring it around." Larson answers with a startling (in the context of the harmony vocals that she has contributed to the rest of the album) lead rock vocal:

I'm runnin', I'm runnin', I'm runnin'
 Down the proud highway
 Yeah, I'm runnin', I'm runnin', I'm runnin'
 Down the proud highway
 And as long as I keep movin'
 I won't need a place to stay.

Larson's vocal is accompanied by drums and electric guitar and reveals no intention of ever laying down the big spike of her motorcycle, and so bringing it to rest. Young then repeats the chorus as if he has not heard Larson's vocal; and Larson

responds with the lyrics contained in the epigraph to this postscript/ conclusion. But something has changed now as Young gradually begins to support Larson's vocal with his own wistful harmonies. He has heard her the second time, and responds.

What interests me in these lyrics is the introduction of all the paraphernalia of the American postal system: the "box" and "flag." The character that Larson is singing has just escaped from "the memory county jail" and figures herself as "runnin' / Down the proud highway" on course at some point to catch up with Young on the path that he has chosen. Larson is "here to deliver", but can only do so if Young is prepared to read her mail—if he has the flag on his box up (which he has). The "proud highway" is, then, another version of the epistolary space that I have described in this thesis. As usual, it is imagined as a site of contention. For Larson seems to represent the spirit of rock music that Young has temporarily abandoned, in favour of the folk music that he learnt on the Toronto coffee house circuit of his youth. Young was deeply ambivalent about this heritage. His album *After the Goldrush* (1970) details his feelings of disillusion after the huge folk festival at Woodstock that was widely felt to have consummated the youthful popular culture of the 1960s. And *Tonight's the Night* (1975) expresses his bitterness at the drug death of Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten, in terms that are very far from the nostalgic and simplistic vision provided by folk. Young never entirely lets go of folk but it is significant that an album like *Comes a Time* is disturbed by the imagination of an epistolary space between his present and his past: with Larson as the spirit of rock traversing this space on a motorcycle and finally imploring: "My message is ready/ If there's time enough." On this album at least, there isn't enough time. The tenth and final track, 'Four Strong Winds', is a cover of a classic folk song from the early 1960s by Ian Tyson. On Young's next album (*Rust Never Sleeps* (1979)), however, the split between folk and rock is made even more explicit. The first half of the album is acoustic, very much like *Comes a Time*; but the whole of the second half is electric and in 'Hey Hey, My My (Into the Black)' includes "the story of Johnny Rotten", whose punk band The Sex Pistols had only recently reinvigorated rock music after years of stagnation. Moreover, the break between the two halves of the album is provided by 'Powderfinger': a song about the meaningless death of a young

country boy in the American Civil War that explodes the comfortable rural nostalgia of folk music.

(ii)

Surveying the period from 1649 to 1750, from the England of Charles I to that of George II, John Spurr considers whether or not there is a movement from the “strange and alien [to] ... a world comfortingly like our own in many ways: with newspapers ... concerts and public parks ... a post office and bureaucrats” (1998, 3). He decides rather that the eighteenth century, just as much as the seventeenth, can be viewed as “an ugly, violent age” on the clear evidence of the “strife of dissenter against churchman, Protestant against Catholic, and Whig against Tory” (4). In this interpretation far from representing a sign of the development of one of the modern comforts, the foundation of the Post Office merely opens up another contested (epistolary) space; another site of confusion and conflict. The enduring legacy of this opening up is demonstrated by my analysis of the lyrics of ‘Motorcycle Mama’. My examination of the letters of Sir George Etherege, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the Countesses of Hertford and Pomfret, and Lucius Henry Hibbins confirms this interpretation; demonstrating that letters were deeply involved in the events leading up to the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9, the Whig schism of 1716-18, the gradual fall of Sir Robert Walpole between 1738 and 1742, and the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745-6. However, there was another side to the period and another use of imaginations of epistolary space. Steven Zwicker notes that:

women writers, emboldened by the upheavals that challenged hierarchies and overturned the social order in the 1650s, wrote beyond the earlier confines of devotion and lyric. From what might seem a paradoxical space—opened after 1660 by court culture and Tory, indeed patriarchal, ideology—Aphra Behn, Mary Astell, and Delarivier Manley embarked on bold careers ... (1998, xii)

Similarly, my readings of the letters of Dorothy Osborne and of the fictional letters of Clarissa Harlowe demonstrate how, from another paradoxical space, these writers manage at least temporarily to escape the confines in which men have attempted to

place them. Both also looked to London; and the phenomenal growth of that city during this period has been seen in several chapters of this thesis to be closely although variously linked to imaginations of epistolary space. Zwicker argues that the years 1650-1740, whose literature was once “glossed over as an era of court corruption and social comedy, a mere pause in the progress of English liberty and English letters”, can now be celebrated for “their political sophistication, their philosophical—even spiritual—strengths, and their daring experiments with social and sexual identities” (xii). With the introduction of the concept of—and the demonstration of the existence of many different imaginations of—epistolary spaces, this thesis has demonstrated that the same was also true for letters of the period.

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